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## IN TWO YEARS' TIME.

BY

### ADA CAMBRIDGE.

# IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I.



# LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

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# CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER			PAGE
I.	NARRAPORWIDGEE	•••	1
II.	AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE		18
III.	PEARS AND GREENGAGES	•••	46
IV.	Arcadia		74
٧.	Despair	•••	93
VI.	Tom Smith's Family Diamonds		110
VII.	On the Mail Steamer		141
VIII.	Some English Relations		166
IX.	ELEANOR ARMYTAGE		192
X.	My Introduction to Mrs. Grunds	7	218
VΤ	Long Wromphoor		040

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### IN TWO YEARS' TIME.

### CHAPTER I.

#### NARRAPORWIDGEE.

"SEVEN o'clock!" exclaimed father, throwing his hat (with a very dirty puggaree on it) upon the drawing-room sofa. "Isn't that confounded boy back yet?" Mother looked up from a low chair with her gentle face of reproof. She had a great objection to strong language, and, to do him justice, father seldom used it; but he was hot and tired, poor man, after drafting sheep all day in a north wind, and, moreover, the boy in question had gone to post for the

English letters, and was half an hour beyond his usual time for returning.

"He started late," said mother. "Pat Malony wanted him to help to put out a fire in the lake paddock. Go and change your dress, my dear, and we'll have dinner. I think the wind is turning; it is not quite so hot as it was."

Father obediently took himself off, puffing and blowing and wiping his forehead vigorously, his dirty puggaree flapping against his dirty grass-cloth coat (I don't think he would have presented himself to us in that costume if it had not been mail day). Mother folded up her work and laid it neatly in her basket. I rushed out upon the verandah to consult the stable weathercock, and, finding that it indicated a blessed south sea-breeze coming round, flourished up all the blinds and flung open all the

windows, which had been tight shut since early morning from the oven heat outside.

"Gently, my dear!" called mother after me, as the tail of my thin dress whisked round a rough bole of grape vine clasping a verandah post, and the bottom flounce parted with half a yard of lace. "I wish you would move more quietly, Kitty."

"I wish I could, mother, but this lovely air is intoxicating," I responded, tucking up my tail and dancing down upon the lawn and back again, with my hands stretched out. "I believe it will be cold by bed-time, really."

The dinner bell rang, and I went indoors through the dining-room window, and took my seat at table. Father, spruce and fresh after a bath and change of clothes, stood up over a pair of boiled fowls, and shut his eyes, and muttered briskly, "For what we are going to receive—wing or breast, my dear?"—as if it were all one sentence (another little habit he had which mother would have liked to break him of, if she had not known her place too well). And mother, looking with her calm eyes upon the sun-browned, arid landscape beyond the garden gate, remarked, as she helped herself to a slice of pork, "I see Sandy now, crossing the ford. Let us get dinner over before we open the bag."

We generally did what she told us, and we did now; but dinner was a brief ceremony in consequence. The fowls gave place to the puddings, and the puddings to the cheese, with a celerity that Ah Foo, the Chinaman cook, was not used to these hot days, and we left a lovely dish of raspberries and cream untouched for the

first time that year. (N.B.—It was nearly the end of January, and they were just going out of season at Narraporwidgee.) Mother rose with her accustomed dignity, and went into the hall to sort the servants' letters into the hands of Bridget the parlour-maid. She selected her own correspondence from the remainder, gave several letters and a bundle of newspapers to father, and then deliberately hung up the bag on its proper peg. Finally, we went out and seated ourselves on the verandah, now cool and breezy, with one of those sudden evening changes peculiar to the Australian climate; and father commenced operations by reading his newspaper telegrams aloud, as usual, and then tearing open the one English letter he had received.

"Well!" he exclaimed presently, and

continued gazing at his letter, with a complacent smile on his honest face. Of course mother and I looked up at him expectantly.

"The market not gone down yet?" she inquired.

"No," he replied; "I believe the tide is on the turn, but it hasn't turned yet. Prices may even rise a little more, Norton thinks."

"Dear me, I am very glad," said mother; and so she looked, though she never visibly excited herself. She knew quite well that the price of wool, even at its then rate, if it lasted long enough (until father's shipment arrived in London) meant an increase of a great deal to our income for the year; and she knew, too, that that increase meant so much more promise for her of the fulfilment of a great hope and scheme that she

had cherished for many years. It was pathetic to see the wistful eyes that she lifted to his, as he continued to look in her face steadily.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking of," said he; "and I have been thinking of it too. I believe it might be managed now. I said to myself only this morning, while I was drafting those ewes, 'If wool makes as much this year as it did last, I can afford to turn the whole concern over to somebody else, and Mary shall have her wish.' So you shall," he added, letting his broad palm fall upon her shapely shoulder. "We'll wait till we hear the bales are in the market, and we'll start home by the very next mail, if you like."

I looked at mother, and her face was a study. A delight that would have overbalanced the self-possession of anybody else struggled to break through her cloak of dignified reserve, and she would not let it. Her eyes grew moist, and her mouth twitched at the corners; but she just took father's hand from her shoulder, and laid it to her lips, and replied, gently, "Thank you, my dear; I shall be very glad. It will be such a good thing for Kitty."

When father was a young man (what he calls a young man, about thirty-eight or forty years of age), he and mother came out to Australia to seek their fortunes, bringing me, a baby, with them. My grandfather had died several years before, leaving a home-made will, and my uncle, his eldest son, his sole executor; and uncle James, of whose integrity and uprightness no one had ever had the faintest suspicion, was tempted by some

flaws in that irregular testament to take a mean advantage of his brother and My father, who was the last to see evil in any one, let things drift a little while, not suspecting mischief; but when the truth was suddenly forced upon him he arose to do battle for himself and his sisters with all his might and main. Aunt Alice and aunt Kate were both married, and of course their husbands joined the fray, with their respective family solicitors; and very soon the affair got into Chancery, and into the hands of about fifty lawyers (speaking roughly), and, after two or three years of suspense and misery, my father and my aunts-who had only right on their side, while uncle James had the law on his—found themselves no better off than if grandpapa had left them nothing, and,

indeed, rather worse. Aunt Alice's husband was a wealthy London merchant, and scorned to consider the loss of such a trifle as £5000; and aunt Kate's husband. who was a dignified country rector of old family and ample means, paid his fees gracefully, and comforted aunt Kate by an extra allowance of pin-money thenceforth. But my poor daddy, hot and sore with indignation and defeat, reckless and disgusted with everybody and everything, gathered together what few hundreds he could call his own, told mother to pack up her clothes, and her plate and linen, and anything else she cared to keep, advertised his house and furniture, took our passages in the Great Britain, and shook the dust of his native land from off his feet for ever. "For ever" was what he said, and mother made no protest at the time against a sentence of perpetual banishment which almost broke her heart. Everything comes to those who wait, it is said: mother was wise and waited, and the things she wished for certainly did seem to come to her, sooner or later.

They had had hard times in their early years of exile. Father had not felt his privations on his own account: he was a vigorous, enterprising, hopeful man, to whom difficulties came with a certain pleasant zest. He was a born gentleman, too (though I say it that shouldn't), and so was never troubled with those scruples of gentility which cause such poignant distress to many people in what they call "reduced circumstances." He delighted in his skill as groom and gardener, builder and bricklayer, wood-cutter and butcher, and Jack-of-all-trades, and understood that

the doing of all that rough work well conferred a new dignity of manhood upon him. As far as himself was concerned, I believe those struggling years were the happiest of his life, judging from the tone of his reminiscences, which is always tender, and heartfelt, and vaguely regretful. It was mother who suffered poor mother!—without a word of complaint, of course. She had to be left alone whole days together, while father was working on his run, and the blacks used to prowl about the house and terrify her. There were swagmen turning up at all hours for rations—very shady characters, some of them; and there were the bushrangers (who, to be sure, never came, but might have come, which was almost as bad). The snakes used to glide between the shrunk boards of the floors: the wild

dogs used to make her blood run cold with that dreadful howl of theirs at nightfall, when they came sniffing round after the sheep; the native cats were her torment in the poultry-yard, and the opossums as bad in the orchard. Worse than any of these, there were the wretched trolloping women—that was father's description of them—that she had to do with for servants, when lucky enough to get servants at all, who wore her life out with coarse words Little brothers and sisters and ways. were born in the wilderness, and poor mother had to fall back upon an awkward man and a little child (me) to wait on her properly, and make her a decent cup of gruel when she wanted it. And the babies died in the wilderness, too, with little or no doctor's skill to help them, and had to be laid in their little graves under a

wattle tree, with only their parents' love and tears to consecrate the ground.

But these were very old times. Father made money rapidly, as no steady and persevering man could well help doing, under the circumstances; and money, of course, brought us comfort in all sorts of ways. As fences meandered all over the run, and stock increased, and the value of wool with it, the weatherboard house grew bigger and bigger, and its new rooms were furnished more and more luxuriously. Then a better class of domestics, and many more of them, appeared in the colony, railways were opened, townships were founded and grew and flourished, lawyers and doctors, and police magistrates and bankers, began to organize some system of society in those little centres of population. We were able to drive to church over a macadamized

road, instead of being restricted to a family service in the dining-room at home, as for ten years had been the case; and I was fortunate enough to possess in my governess an accomplished and well-bred lady. By-and-by, from a well-to-do squatter, father became an extensive landowner and a rich man. He bought his land easily by instalments before free selectors had discovered its value; and then land in Victoria suddenly rose to a great price, and his erewhile moderate estate became worth £60,000 at the lowest market rate. had preferred sheep to cattle always; and at this time the owners of sheep stations had such a run of luck, in good seasons and high prices, for a few years, as they probably never had before, and seem never likely to have again.

Just at this flood-time in his fortunes,

and before the evil days of drought and had government fell upon the colony in general, and the class in particular to which he belonged, that memorable mail arrived from England which decided him to sell his property and go home. Just at first (when mother and he talked over their plans on the verandah that night) he seemed disinclined to sell, and proposed to leave a manager in charge of everything. But mother, without in the least assuming to give advice, suggested the difficulty of finding a man at once capable and trustworthy enough for so responsible a post, and the probability that such years of prosperity as we had had latterly would not, in the nature of things, last much longer. It had always been a land of vicissitudes, in which men made and lost fortunes with equal celerity; and suppose

now (she hinted in the most modest manner) that droughts came and the stock died from starvation, or suppose the scab broke out again and swept them off, or suppose these high prices fell, as they were bound to do some time or another, or an ignorant Government succeeded in turning everything upside down.

"Then, perhaps, it would be wisest to sell," said father, in a tone of deliberation that meant he had made up his mind to do so; but he sighed as he thought of all his improvements, and what a nice place he had made of it.

The fact was, father had an idea of coming back again, and I am sure mother never meant he should, if she could help it.

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### CHAPTER II.

#### AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE.

I had my share in the conversation—and the lion's share it always was—until Bridget brought tea out to the verandah. I was wild with excitement at this mighty change in my fortunes and the novel experiences in store for me, and I wanted immediately to know all about everything, from cabin furniture to the Zoological Gardens and Madame Tussaud's, wild beasts and waxwork being objects which (grown up though I was, or thought I was) appealed far more strongly to my

imagination than the museums and operas and picture-galleries that mother tried to tempt me with. By-and-by, however, I began to see that I bothered them a little, and that they had higher matters to talk over. So, when I had taken my cup of tea, I left them to enjoy theirs in peace, and, wrapping myself in a light scarf that hung in the hall, went down into the garden for a stroll.

It was a lovely, soft, cool night, raging hot and nasty though all the day had been. The north wind blew no longer, as if from the mouths of a million red-hot ovens: it had gone almost round to the south, and came rustling, fresh and sweet, through the trees and shrubs, with a dewy smell of flowers (from the few the drought had left) mingling with the faint hay scent of the burnt-up paddocks. There was a

little crescent moon shining above the many roofs of the low house and outbuildings, showing the delicate transparency of the atmosphere, even on a cloudy night, as never moon could show me in England afterwards. Some great oleander trees (it would have been an insult to call them bushes) blushed rosily out from the half-darkness, nodding their pink bunches over the verandah roofs, as if proud to remind me that they were nearly all I had to depend upon in this scorching weather for the innumerable flower-vases that I loved to scatter all over the house.

It was such a sweet night, that it made me (even me) feel, all at once, a little melancholy. I began to think of some things I had forgotten in my first burst of excitement at the prospect of going home. It occurred to me, for the first time, to wonder whether I should really like England as well as my own dear Narraporwidgee? And could I part with Spring, my canine familiar, who was as much my shadow as any witch's black cat? He was sniffing round my petticoats now, poking his wet black nose under my arm and into my face, as I leaned on the garden gate, in an attitude of contemplation that he was not used to, and could not understand.

The dear old dog! He seldom took a night's rest anywhere but on the verandah outside my door—the glass door that was also the window of my bedroom; and if I did let him lie under my bed in the daytime when it was blinding hot outside, he was my dog, and it was nobody's business but my own. Who would under-

stand his ways and wants as I did? Who would take him down to the dam and the river for his swims, and see that he got the bits of mutton he liked best? And how could he bear his life without me?

At this stage of my meditations, when my eyes were filling with tears, and I was wildly resolving to pay his passage and smuggle him along with me somehow, if I had to sell my new watch and chain to do it, Spring jumped out of my embraces with a sudden energy that nearly knocked me over, and darted in pursuit of a wretched little opossum that was just scuttling up the trunk of my favourite plum tree. He scratched my arm with his iron claws, and I did not cry over him any more.

I began to think of the plums, which would be ripe enough for jam in another

week or two. Oh, who would make the jam? And who would eat it? I had visions of strange people rudely criticizing our pretty house, rummaging about mother's dainty store-rooms, and tramping over our sacred Persian carpet with muddy boots; and they made me very sad.

Then, by the vague moonlight, I saw the horses in the home paddock quietly sauntering about and enjoying the night air, and amongst them I easily recognized my own lovely Bronzewing—the most perfect lady's horse, many people said, in the whole of the Western district. The pretty creature! I should know him from a thousand in any scrap of moonlight—the graceful droop and lift of his strong, supple neck, and the way he raised his feet as he trod the earth, that hardly seemed good enough for him to walk on. He whisked his silky

tail from side to side, and nibbled, and glided from shadow to shadow, little thinking, poor dear Bronzewing, what was in store for him and me!

I wondered would daddy let me take my horse to England? Perhaps would, if I made a great point of it; he never liked to refuse me anything if he could help it. Bronzewing was not like poor Spring; he really was valuable, in whatever part of the world he might be. His father and mother both came from England, to begin with. If daddy did not mind paying all that for the parents, he surely wouldn't mind paying a little for the son, who had, as he always said, all the good points of both of them. It was hardly a month ago that the Indian buyer offered a hundred pounds for him, and father would not entertain the offer for a

moment. So, feeling pretty comfortable about Bronzewing, I began to think of somebody else—Tom.

Tom was the only son of our next-door neighbour, and lived only five miles off, and he was my great friend. That is to say, he had been my great friend for years when we were children, until his father sent him home to Oxford, and then I did not see him for nearly four years. He had only been back about six months, and we had renewed our acquaintance on rather a different footing, for now we were both grown up. He was nearly twentythree, and I was just over eighteen. I could not say that we were not great friends still. He brought me some presents from Oxford when he came back a pretty box for my handkerchiefs, and a book of photographs of the colleges, with

a cardinal's hat on the cover (he was a' Christ Church man), and a set of Egyptian jewellery that he said was the fashion in England—and these were the greatest treasures I had in the world.

I had no girl friends that I cared for. A few young ladies lived around us, but mother did not consider them what she called "her sort," and did not encourage any intimacy between them and me. (She was considered "stuck up" in consequence, which did not affect her in the slightest degree.) I seldom felt myself tempted to disregard her prejudices, for I don't think they were my sort either. I did not like girls.

But Tom's father was my father's old friend, and his mother my mother's "sort" exactly, the very image of her ideal gentlewoman, Mrs. Delany, as if she had stepped out of Lady Llanover's book. And so, considering what near neighbours we were, Tom and I were intimate by the mere force of circumstances.

Did I say that his name was Smith—Tom Smith? I am very sorry, but so it was. He ought to have had a nobler name to match his noble height of six feet two and a half, and his noble, honest, handsome face, and the noble old blood that mother said he inherited on both sides; but—well, he hadn't. And, after all, what does it matter? It is only in novels that names are always appropriate to the people who own them; it very seldom is so in real life.

When I began to think of Tom, I became far more melancholy than any thought of Spring or Bronzewing had

made me. How Tom would miss me! And where should I find another like him, whatever part of the world I might go to?

Mother was fond of contrasting the manners of society in "her time" and in her country with the disrespect for les convenances which characterized some of her acquaintances of later years, particularly the young men; but I had seen plenty of emigrant Englishmen, and not one of them the gentleman Tom was in all his ways, not only after he left Oxford, but before he went there, though certainly Oxford life did develop and polish him wonderfully.

Sighing heavily, and caring no more for the Zoological Gardens and Madame Tussaud's, I opened the garden gate and went out into the paddock. Spring, having barked himself hoarse at the opossum, which sat serenely on an exposed bough above him, with pointed ears pricked up and bushy tail hanging down, uttering a nervous little accompaniment of growls, discharged a final volley, and trotted after me; and, not consciously following any route in particular, we went towards the river, nearly a mile away, which was threatening to dry up into a chain of stagnant water-holes. Across the moonlit paddock, scorched to a sandy white; over the slip-panels in the fence, which, of course, I never dreamed of taking down; through a larger extent of burnt-up meadow, where white-faced Herefords came up to us and stared at us, munching audibly in the still night air: over another fence—a brush fence this time, instead of posts and rails—through which I scrambled where I saw a likely

place, irrespective of gates, and in which my muslin train came to most dreadful grief; through more paddocks, this time sprinkled with shorn white sheep, who scampered away from Spring in the most abject terror, though he would have scorned to look at them; and finally into the shadow of the belt of gum and wattle trees that fringed the windings of the little river.

Any one who had watched me taking such a walk at that time of night, and especially if he or she had seen what came of it, would certainly have accused me of keeping clandestine appointments with young men—a thing I would no more dream of doing than mother herself, notwithstanding my unfortunate ignorance of Mrs. Grundy's prejudices.

I was used to these wild rambles at

all hours, considering my dog a cient escort. I was a thorough bush mother sadly acknowledged, girl, as and had no fear of strange men, or horned cattle, or snakes, or darkness, or rain, or anything else that I know of. when, from under the bank of the river, a great curly sheep dog rushed up at us, and began to growl at Spring, the two wagging their tails and putting their black noses together, I was as much surprised and dismayed as ever I was in my life. It was Tom's dog, as I knew in a moment; and of course Tom followed him up the bank to see what he was after. He must have been pretty much astonished too, when he saw me standing above him, in my white dress, without a scrap of hat on.

"Oh, Tom, what are you doing here?"

I cried nervously, feeling my face and neck on fire—the first time I had ever been affected that way by a meeting with him.

"Why, Kitty, is it you?" he responded incredulously. "What are you doing so far away from home? You have nobody with you?"

"No—only Spring. We were just having a walk, and I thought, when we were so far, I'd see if there were any ducks in that corner where the moon shines. Father and mother were busy talking, and did not want me. I didn't notice how the time was going. I'm afraid it's getting very late, Tom?"

"Nearly nine o'clock, I should think. Never mind; it's a lovely night. Come and sit on this stump a few minutes while I set my trap, and then I'll walk home with you. Do you know what I am doing? Trying to catch some more waterrats for you. I've got two hung up in that tree. I've dressed thirteen skins already—wattle-bark, and pumice-stone, and all the proper things. You'd never know they had not been done by a furrier; they are as soft as wash-leather, and the fur like silk. If you cut off the yellowish part at the edges, and leave only the brown, they will be plenty wide enough, and you will have the swellest imaginable jacket by next winter."

I took his hand and scrambled down the bank, in a happy flutter of shame and pleasure, renewing my assurances that I no more dreamt of seeing him there than of seeing the bunyip itself."

"Of course you didn't," he replied cheerfully. "But, you see, this is how it

was: the moon got up, and as I had been too busy all day to see after them, it occurred to me that I might as well take a stroll down the river and look at my traps. And I'm very glad I did, Kitty. I'll never spoil a good mind again, for fear of what I might lose by it."

I sat down contentedly on my stump, and watched him tilting up a wooden candle-box with some sticks and a mutton bone and a piece of string, and arranging the primitive apparatus safely on a platform he had prepared for it; the while he threatened his dog, who stood over him, with the direst penalties if he ventured to interfere. And when I saw that he had quite done, I got up and turned to ascend the bank again.

"Stay a few minutes, Kitty," he called out hastily. "Now you are here you may as well take breath before you start all that way home."

I scouted the idea of being tired and wanting rest; but, while I hesitated, he held out his hand, and I turned back again and allowed him to reseat me on my stump. What would mother have thought? But I could not help it.

"We'll give ourselves five minutes," he said, turning the face of his watch to the moonlight. "It's just a quarter to nine, and we'll start at the ten minutes. Come here, you good-for-nothing brute! Didn't I tell you to leave that alone?" This was addressed to his dog. "Now then, Kitty, what's the news? I haven't seen you for more than a week, you know."

He stretched himself on the bank beside me, and took off his hat to the cool breeze. Did he know, I wonder, how he looked, with the moonlight on his wide brows and his strong, straight nose, and his close-cropped shapely brown head? Not he. But I did; and I wondered if I should ever see his like again, in England or any other land.

"Oh, Tom, news!" I cried out piteously.

"There is dreadful news! Father has really made up his mind at last to go home."

"The dickens he has!" responded Tom under his breath, suddenly raising himself on his elbow, and looking at me. "But I thought that was what you had been wishing for, Kitty, these years and years?"

"So I did—so I do," said I; "but now it seems so near, somehow I feel it will be a great wrench."

"It will be an awful wrench to those

you will leave behind," said Tom; "I know that well enough. How soon will you go, do you think?"

- "As soon as ever father hears that his wool has got home safely."
- "Not much fear of that, I should think."
- "Oh, I don't know. The ship might be wrecked, or be too late for the good market. And sometimes wool, when it has been packed damp, takes fire like haystacks — spontaneous combustion, you know."
- "I believe that is known to happen, about once in a thousand years," said Tom, gravely; "but it couldn't happen very well in this case. Why, there wasn't a drop of rain all shearing, nor for ever so long after."
  - "Well, at any rate, that's all I know.

As soon as father is satisfied that this last clip of wool is all right, we are to start."

Tom was silent after this, and I began to think it was time to be going home.

"Wait a moment, Kitty. I can't take it all in at once. How long are you going for? When will you be back?"

"I don't think we shall ever be back," I answered in a despairing tone. "Father is going to sell everything; and I believe, if mother once finds herself in England again, a team of bullocks wouldn't drag her back."

"No; a team of bullocks wouldn't be much good, certainly. Oh, dear me! why didn't you all go four or five years ago? We could have had some fun then."

"I wish we had, with all my heart," said I.

"And, I suppose," continued Tom, in

a very grumbling tone, "as you haven't made your *début* in Melbourne, you'll come out at home; be presented at Court, perhaps."

"No, we don't go to Court," I replied, with a complacent sense of dignity and grandeur, as that mythical officer, with whom we are all acquainted, might have remarked of his regiment that they didn't dance. "Grandmamma was the last of the family who was presented. But I dare say I shall see a great deal of company in my aunts' houses."

"I expect you will. I know what your aunt Alice's house is, for I was there when Regy came of age. Don't you have anything to do with Regy, Kitty; he is not a nice fellow."

"Isn't he? I've always heard he was very nice."

"No, he isn't. A good many fellows aren't, in the set he belongs to. Do you know, Kitty, I've a good mind to sell out too, and come home to help look after you. You've got no brothers."

"I'm sure you're very kind," I retorted, a little nettled by his disparagement of my relations; "but I have a father and mother, and they have managed to take care of me pretty well so far. Besides, how can you sell out? You have nothing to sell."

"I beg your pardon. Since I came to man's estate the governor has made me his partner. Half Booloomooroo belongs to me."

"But you couldn't leave the poor old man, and your mother. You don't know how she pined and moped all the time you were at Oxford."

"Poor old mother! no, of course not. I must just grin and bear it, Kitty. I must trust you not to forget your old friends when you are amongst so many new ones."

"You may," I said earnestly, touched by something in his voice, and recovering from my little huff in a moment. "I shall never forget my old friends, wherever I am. If I never see you again, Tom, nobody in all the world"—here I stopped, overwhelmed with horror at what I was going to say.

"Finish it," he urged, drawing himself up to my knee, and looking eagerly in my face—an eagerness I felt rather than saw. "Nobody in all the world—what?"

"Nobody will make me forget my old friends in Australia," I replied hastily. "Isn't it going to rain, Tom? How dark it is getting! And we must have exceeded our five minutes long ago."

"I wish you had finished that sentence,"

he remarked quietly, getting up from the grass as I rose. "However, thank you for the beginning, Kitty. Yes; we'd better get back as quick as we can. I did not notice how it was clouding over. What a blessing rain would be!—but not to you in that thin frock. If it comes on, you must have my coat."

We never, during all our intercourse, said so little to one another in a given time as during our walk home that night. I could not think of anything to talk about, and I suppose he would not; and yet the silence seemed to shout to us. It was so dark now, with heavy rain-clouds gathering up, that I was glad to take his offered hand, and be guided through the paddocks and fences that I knew so well. In old days we used to scramble over these latter together, and tear our clothes in company;

but now he opened the gates and took down the slip panel, as if he had been escorting mother. When we approached the high hedges of the garden, he made a little pause; and our dogs came and sniffed at us, full of curiosity to know what was going to happen next.

- "Kitty," said he, "shall I come in and speak to them? Or would you rather say good night here?"
- "Couldn't you stay all night, Tom? It is going to be wet, and you have so far to walk."
- "Oh no, Kitty, certainly not; my people don't know where I am. And a drop of rain would do one good this weather."
- "Then, perhaps—they are very much occupied to-night—perhaps we had better say good night now; and I shall go in the back way. Good night, Tom."

My hand had lain all this time in the warm clasp of his; now I drew it away, without daring to wait for any more farewells. I ran in by the back door without looking behind me, and along the passages to the drawing-room. Here, or rather on the verandah outside, mother and father were talking still; and I went to bid them good night too, for I did not want to sit up any longer.

"It's going to rain at last, daddy," said I, by way of saying something.

"Yes, Kitty, thank God; it won't hold off above five minutes longer. We shall get the tanks filled to-night, and you'll see the grass beginning to grow before to-morrow night."

And while I was undressing it came down in sheets—a way it has in this part of the world when it means to rain at allbeating straight into the verandah, through the veil of vine leaves, so that even poor Spring was driven from his door-mat, and I had to let him in and give him the hearthrug instead.

Oh, my dear love, how wet you must have got that night!

## CHAPTER III.

## PEARS AND GREENGAGES.

THE next day was Saturday, and mother began to be restlessly busy—for her. She and father had decided that nothing could very well happen to the wool on its voyage to London, and that, even if the prices did fall in the market before it got there, we could not now give up our enterprise; and so the March mail was fixed upon as the date of our departure, and that was not more than six weeks off.

"It will be well to get home before the summer there sets in," said she. "Kitty should see England in springtime first. Ah, Kitty, you don't know what is in store for you!" And she began to remind father of the Aprils and Mays of their early married life in Norfolk, and to talk of hawthorn hedges and delicate leafage of green woods, of cowslips and primroses, cuckoos and nightingales, and so on, until they both got quite sentimental about it.

As soon as breakfast was over father went into his office and drew out his advertisement for the Melbourne papers, wherein he described Narraporwidgee in the glowing terms it deserved. So-and-so had been instructed by Harry Chamberlayne, Esq., to sell by auction, at their rooms, Collins Street West, on the —th of February, 187—, at half-past two o'clock p.m., the Narraporwidgee station, situated so and so, and consisting of so many

thousand acres of freehold, and so many thousand acres of Crown land, so many sheep, cattle, horses, etc.; and when he had done describing these matters, and all the river frontages that he had, and all the miles of fencing he had put up, and how the paddocks that these enclosed were "unsurpassed for grazing capabilities," he called in mother to help him to set forth with sufficient pomp the details of the home station—its many rooms and outbuildings, its stores and men's huts, its tanks and wells, its superior woolshed and screw press, its stables and coach-houses, its gardens and orchards, and so on; and it took up the best part of mother's morning.

But when this document was disposed of, she set to work at her own preparations with a zeal and energy that astonished me, used as I was to her quiet ways. She rummaged out drawers and cupboards, turned over and sorted her household stores, made long lists of things she had and things she wanted, and chatted away to me as I helped her with a subdued vivacity that was very pleasant to see.

"I am not going to get you any new dresses, Kitty," she said, when my ward-robe was under consideration. "You have plenty for the voyage—the simpler they are the better for that purpose. It does not matter about wearing them out quickly; as soon as we reach London you shall have a complete outfit." It made all seem so near and so sudden.

Saturday evening was fair and clear, with nothing to hinder the moon from shining in all her glory. The sky had not a cloud, and was sprinkled with pale stars,

the Southern Cross hanging just over the biggest of the big Portugal laurels that father was so proud of. Already, as he had prophesied, there was a sprinkling of young grass blades all over everywhere from last night's rain, though the earth had been looking for weeks as if it had been skinned, so quickly does nature recover herself in this wonderful climate. There was a fresh scent of growth and moisture in the soft air, which was cool and sweet as the airs of paradise. Yet I did not go for a walk. I had a sniff from the verandah, while we enjoyed our afterdinner cup of tea, and that was all. Spring went off into the shrubberies to indulge in the pleasures of the chase by himself; mother sat down to begin her English letters, though the mail did not go out for at least ten days; and daddy

lit his pipe, and put his hands into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and marched up and down the verandah in peaceful contemplation—conning his late literary effort, I suppose. I, in the most unromantic manner, made myself comfortable in the easiest armchair, surrounded myself with English papers and magazines, and diligently read tales and tragedies, real and fictitious, until it was time to go to bed.

This being Saturday, naturally the next day was Sunday; and that Sunday was one to be evermore marked in my calendar with the whitest of white stones. It was lovely in respect of weather, to begin with; not hot, and not grey or overcast; breezy and balmy, and peaceful and spring-like. Flowers were sprouting afresh; the distant hill-ranges had got a new tinge

of colour on them from the fresh-springing verdure that was only a day old; the magpies chattered and gabbled about the garden more musically, I thought, than usual—as if they, too, had fallen upon a gala Sunday.

I opened my glass doors when I was half dressed, and stood on the threshold to brush my hair, the sweet air blowing through it as I did so. How often I have looked back to my little chamber at Narraporwidgee, when cooped up in English bedrooms, and thought of that friendly garden walking quite up to my door, the rose petals drifting in upon my table, the grapes hanging at my hand (that I used to gather and eat as I performed my toilet), the freshness of the morning all around me, and dear old Spring lightly trotting over the China

matting, or lying in the doorway to watch all my performances. I hate "upstairs," and always shall, if I live to be a hundred.

Never in my life did I make a Sunday toilet with so much care and deliberation. I was a good-looking girl enough, more especially as to figure and carriage, about which mother was much more particular than she was about my complexion, which, to be sure, had been well sunburnt; but I do myself only justice when I say I had never been vain of my appearance. never was until now. But I am not sure that a little vanity did not come to life that Sunday morning when I stood so long at my looking-glass. I liked the look of my own face, which gazed at me with large, frank, thoughtful eyes; I liked the look of my own hair, soft, and shiny, and plentiful, and the colour of a pale chestnut.

and the look of the large braids that showed their golden ridges just over the top of my head. I greatly admired my own costume, which I selected more because it was the one I liked best than because it was the best suited to a January morning. It was black silk, rich and plain, fitting me beautifully. A collar of Honiton lace and a soft ruffle adorned my throat, and wide lace was laid, cuff fashion, on the close sleeves, edged, too, with ruffles round my wrists. I give this particular description, because it was a part of the ceremonial of the great festival day of my life, and because it has been the type of costume that I have worn—to please somebody-ever since.

Mother looked at me approvingly when I came in to breakfast. The rich old lace had been hers, and she loved it; and she

loved the style of that simple but costly gown. She was pleased whenever she saw what she considered signs of taste in her colonial girl, who in earlier days had been too fond of many colours.

"You needn't hack that dress, dear," she said, as she kissed me. "You can wear that quite well when you get home. Still, it is a cool morning and you look very nice; doesn't she, daddy?"

"She always looks nice," replied daddy, as he helped me to a chop; but that was more of a compliment than she bargained for.

Breakfast was a late meal on Sunday mornings, and as soon as breakfast was over it was time to get ready for church. Father went to order the horses, and to see them put in also, for like most Australian country gentlemen, he would have thought.

himself very remiss if he did not personally test his buckles and straps and the bolts of his buggy before starting with ladies over bush roads. Mother and I went to dress, which, with me, was a matter of hat and gloves, and then there was a grand gathering of the household. The waggonette was roomy, and took all the womankind on the station who wished to attend church—their respective churches, that is, for we had no female servant just now belonging to our own communion, except the laundress, who was laid up "very bad with the rheumatics" all the fault of that "dreadful night" on Friday, the wicked old creature saidtempting Providence, I told her. Mother took her seat of honour by father's side, and I, two house servants, and the overseer's daughter, disposed ourselves behind,

and I took care to sit by the door, where I could see the road behind us.

"All aboard?" shouted father impatiently. "Give 'em their heads, Joe." Joe sprang back, and the horses, finding themselves free, wriggled for a second, gave two great bounds, and darted out of the yard and into the paddock as if they had wings to their heels.

When English people talk about good driving, with their perfectly broken-in horses, and their level, even roads, and all that elaboration of harness, I simply turn up my nose. Give a man a pair of bush horses like those two of ours, who that very Sunday had their collars on for the sixth or eighth time, and not a bit of a strap behind their slender girth-pads, and see how he would take them through trees and stumps, and ruts and holes, and

creeks and gullies, and ten or fifteen gates. It was beautiful to see how father did it.

We lived nine miles away from the church, and we got there in less than an hour. The bell (which hung from a limb of a tall gum tree in the churchyard) was just beginning to ring, at the instance of a lank lad, who was also the superintendent of the Sunday-school; and the congregation was assembling at its leisure, after the manner of country congregations.

Mother went into the parsonage to see the clergyman's young wife, who had just had her first baby; father drove into the little enclosure set apart for the safe keeping of buggies and horses during service time, took out his fiery pair and hung them up at the fence; and I sedately walked into church. The choir, to which I had the honour to belong, of course sat in the wrong place—close by the entrance door; and here I settled myself, as yet all alone in my glory, in the corner seat that belonged to me, to watch the people coming into church.

I had not watched long, and the little building was filling rapidly (the people being in the habit of hanging about outside to talk to one another till the last moment, and then all flocking in at once), when I heard the sound of light wheels and fast-trotting horses, and my heart began to beat in a hurry.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith came in first, the portly old man with his silver head, and the fine-featured, slender old lady, who was so like Mrs. Delany of a hundred years ago. She was quite unlike anybody I had ever seen. She never wore anything but old brocades and soft black satins, and scraps

and lappets of old ivory-coloured lace, with a China crape shawl in summer and a thick black silk mantle or sable cape in winter. Beside the many-coloured fourth and fifthrate fashionables who sat around her in church, she looked most queerly ancient and picturesque.

I used to wonder where she could have got her clothes from, until mother told me they were the carefully hoarded remnants of a mighty wardrobe that she had had when she was a belle of fashion at some foreign court. Mr. Smith was her second husband, whom she had married rather late in life, and, it was said, under very romantic circumstances. My Tom was their only son.

He came in five minutes after service had begun, for he had stayed behind to take out his horses, and he made his way

at once to a vacant seat beside me, to my extreme content and embarrassment. also was a member of the choir, and in our primitive congregation it did not matter how the voices were mixed up, provided enough of them were there. Anybody sat where anybody liked. We didn't speak to one another, of course, as service was going on, and we didn't want to speak. Two giggling young dressmakers' apprentices sat behind us, whispering comments upon my dress and hat—very sharply on the look-out, I have no doubt, for any communication that might take place between He had forgotten his hymn-book, and us. had to look over mine; but, what with those girls behind us, and the lady who played the harmonium, as locum tenens for the clergyman's wife, making a dreadful mess of it, I was enabled to sing loudly

and steadily, and to comport myself generally with dignity and composure. But I must say I had a sensation of flurry within me that I was not by any means used to.

When the service was over, and we who had buggies were congregated around them, mother and father gave their regular Sunday invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Smith, which they regularly accepted, to lunch with us on their way home. Their way was the same as ours almost up to the garden gate, and then they had between six and seven miles (by the road) further to go. We always reached home at reasonable lunch time, and they could not; and each of the small households enjoyed the weekly intercourse with the other, so that it had become quite an institution. The invitation was offered and accepted just for polite form's sake.

As we were getting into our respective buggies Tom suggested that I might as well go with them as sit alone behind (we had to pick up our servants as we went along). I looked at mother, who said, "Certainly, dear, if you wish," and then climbed to the high box-seat by Tom's side, quite careless how I wiped the wheels with my lustrous skirts, and we led the way out into the village street.

- "I say, didn't it pelt, Kitty, that night?" said Tom, presently, when I had exchanged some remarks with his parents, and we were sitting in silence, side by side. "It's well you got in when you did."
- "Oh yes, Tom; and how I wished you had stayed with us! Did you not get awfully, dreadfully drenched?"
  - "Not a bit. That is, of course I got

wet, but I'm not made of sugar. It takes more than that to affect me. I rather liked it. Will you have another walk to-night, Kitty? There will be no end of a moon after this fine day, and we needn't go home till we like. Mother "—turning his face over his shoulder—"you can have a spell of gossip to-day, for there'll be a lovely moon."

"Oh, my dear, we mustn't be late," responded Mrs. Smith, earnestly. But Tom smiled at me, and showed no alarm at the threat. "Soon you won't have Mrs. Chamberlayne to talk to," said he; "you must remember that."

When we reached home luncheon was ready, and we discussed it at great leisure, with much conversation, as was the rule on Sundays; for on that day it was dinner into the bargain. On this special occasion I would be afraid to say how long we were about it. I know it was nearly four o'clock before father rolled up his napkin and proposed an adjournment to the verandah for dessert. When we got out of the house, we cast about for freedom, Tom and I, and obtained it without any trouble.

"Kitty," said father, "go into the orchard and see how those pears are getting on."

"Pears, daddy!" replied I. "Why, of course they are as hard as nails, and will be for I don't know how long."

"Well, greengages, then—they're ripe, aren't they? Take a basket and see if you can find a dishful for tea. I always think"—turning to Mrs. Smith—"that fruit is never so nice as when freshly gathered off the tree and put on green leaves, as Kitty does it."

"Come along, Kitty," said Tom; "we'll get a choice assortment of whatever's going."

Here poor mother, who foresaw that I might probably tear myself to rags, interfered to bid me go and change my dress first. This I did, with no loss of time; and then we two went away to the orchard, leaving our elders to sip their wine and gossip, and, I dare say, to become quite oblivious of our existence.

"I really think father wanted to get rid of us," said I, as soon as we were out of earshot.

"I dare say he did, and very kind of him, I'm sure. I suppose they want to talk over all this going to England business. Are you still sorry you are going, Kitty?"

"For some things," I replied.

"What things?"

I hesitated, and then said vaguely, "Lots of things."

We reached the orchard, and sauntered silently to a remote shady corner, where, under a huge apple tree, stood a low rustic seat.

- "Let's sit down a bit, Kitty; it's too soon after dinner for you to go rampaging about, making yourself hot. They don't want the fruit till tea-time, and that won't be for hours yet."
- "And I don't believe the greengages are ripe any more than the pears," I said; "we have not had one yet. There might be a few raspberries and some apricots left."
- "Well, we'll see presently. It is so jolly sitting here all by ourselves. You don't know how I have been longing to see you again, ever since Friday night,

when you ran away from me without saying good-bye."

- "No, I didn't."
- "Yes, you did. It was my lucky star brought you down to the river on Friday night, Kitty."
- "You might have got rheumatic fever, and been a cripple all your days, or died," I responded gravely. "People do sometimes, when they get such a drenching as you must have had."

"Not when they are as strong and sound as I am, and if they have sense enough to take their wet clothes off at once and have a stiff glass of brandy and water. Indeed, I think it did me all the good in the world; I wanted a little cooling down."

I had no comment to offer upon that speech, except a rising colour in my face

that I would have given much to have had cooled down. So Tom went on. "Tell me some of the things that make you wish you were not going to England, Kitty."

- "Many things—nothing in particular, I suppose."
- "There are things you don't want to leave?"
  - "Yes."
  - "And people?"
  - "Yes."
- "Whom will you miss most? You are not intimate with many people, Kitty. You have very few friends indeed, for a girl of your age."
- "Yes, very few. I don't think I like girls."

He was silent a minute, looking at me, and then he said, "Are there many people you will miss more than me?" "No," I answered nervously; "how could there be, when there are only a few altogether? Don't go on catechizing, Tom; talk of something. Tell me about England."

"Any one?" he persisted, now looking very grave and eager, and leaning his arm on his knee to see more clearly into my face.

I had to tell the truth. I looked up at a green apple hanging before me, staring with misty eyes, as if I were having my photograph taken. I replied as steadily as I could, "Not any one that I know of."

"One question more, Kitty, and you'll bless my impudence for asking it, I dare say, but I won't bother you any more. Are you sorry you are going, because of leaving me?"

I did not bless his impudence. I looked

into his dear, handsome, eager face, and thought of all that leaving him would cost me, and how blank and empty England would be, if there were untold millions of men in it; and—I am ashamed to say it, though I could not help it any more than I could help being dumb to express my sentiments in any other way—I put my hands to my face and began to cry. I need not say what happened after that. In an instant hands and face were hidden in his breast, and his own strong hands were clasped closely over them. It was only what I might have expected.

"My love! My pretty Kitty! Bless you, my darling!" he exclaimed in a strong passion of emotion that went over me like a tidal wave; and he kissed the top of my head in a way that made my very toes tingle. "Why need we be

separated, my own dear love? If you want me I will come—or I will wait and come—or I will keep you back. Somehow—some way—I will manage that we shall not lose one another. Do you want me, Kitty?"

"Do you want me?" I whispered, lifting my head a little, without drawing it away. "That is the question."

"Haven't I shown you that? Why, before I went away, when you were ever such a little thing, all the time I was at Oxford, every day since I came home—I have dreadfully ever since I came home—I have wanted you. You would have broken my heart on Friday night with that news you brought me, only somehow—you won't mind my saying so now, Kitty?—somehow I had a feeling that it would all come right."

- "I oughtn't to have let you feel so, Tom."
- "Yes; you couldn't help it. And now it has come right I'm the happiest dog in the wide world. Aren't you happy yourself, now?"
- "I am, I am!" I replied heartily (for why should I have tried to hide it?); and I put up one timid and hand laid it on his shoulder. And then he clasped me close, and we took a long, long, long kiss, with scorching faces and loud-beating hearts. And we never thought anything more about pears and greengages until the teabell rang, and it was too late even to think of looking for them.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ARCADIA.

"What shall we do now, Kitty?" said Tom, as we hastened through the orchard, hand in hand, with our empty basket. "Shall I call your father away after tea and speak to him? Or shall we keep the rest of this one day for ourselves, and have a walk to the river in the moonlight? Do you think it would be wrong to have a clandestine engagement, just under their noses, until to-morrow?"

"I don't think so," I replied emphatically. "It would be much the nicest."

- "Much—there's no doubt about that.

  And, after all, nobody can tell what may happen after to-day. Suppose he won't give his consent, Kitty?"
- "He's too kind," I said promptly.

  "And he can't bear to see me miserable."
  - "Not even for your good?"
- "No, not even for my good. Mother would make me miserable for my good, though she would be a deal worse herself all the time; she has the will and the courage, somehow. But poor dear daddy breaks down the moment he sees me even getting ready to cry. I'm more afraid of mother than I am of him. But oh, Tom, what is there to be afraid of? What could any one see in you to object to?"

We were by this time in the back passage, and, doors being closed, stopped to exchange another kiss; and then we sneaked into the dining-room, one after the other, reversing the order of precedence in consideration of my nerves.

- "Hullo, Kitty," said father, looking round the table, which was garnished with a veal pie and some chicken salad, "where are the plums gone to?"
  - "There are none ripe, daddy," faltered I.
- "And couldn't you find any substitute? You might have picked a dish of apricots, at any rate. It doesn't seem natural to have tea on Sundays without fruit of some sort."
- "I don't think there are any apricots left," I suggested, beginning to be uncomfortably conscious that mother was regarding me gravely from the corner of her eye.
  - "None left?" father almost shouted.

"Why, didn't you see Sandy, only yesterday, carrying off a wheelbarrow load for the pigs?"

I hung my head, and mother came to the rescue. "The rain spoiled them," she put in quietly. I was certain, from the tone of her voice, that she scented the truth, though, perhaps, afar off; and I quaked inwardly.

As soon as tea was over, I slipped out of the room and into my bedroom, whence I emerged from my private door into the garden, and ran away to the paddock. In about ten minutes I spied Tom poking about the shrubbery, looking for me; and I called "Cooee!" once or twice, softly, to bring him to my hiding-place.

"I wondered where in the world you were off to," he said in some surprise.

"I'll tell you why I ran away," I eagerly

responded. "I felt certain mother would ask me to sing, or to do something that would keep me indoors; and I could not bear to lose this one evening of our own."

"No, indeed; that would have been hard lines, and no mistake! Ah, well, we'll soon settle with them, and get our liberty honestly, please God."

"We're not dishonest, Tom, I hope."

"No, my darling, no; but you know what I mean."

I did know what he meant, of course. And I slipped my hand in his and we set off across the moonlit grass, with Spring bounding wildly after us. I dare say there were plenty more lovers in the world as happy as we, but we did not think so.

We made our way to the very bend of the river where I met him on Friday night, and sat down on the very identical stump. That is to say, I sat down on it, and he sat as close to me as circumstances permitted, in a very comfortable, if slightly ungraceful attitude. There were some wild ducks dotting the moonlight in the deep pool above us—if it had been a week-night they never would have swum about in that confidential way; and a pair of ridiculous laughing jackasses sat over our heads and jeered at us.

- "Oh, Kitty, Kitty, how many nights like this shall we have, I wonder, out of six weeks of nights! What a dreadful little time it is!"
- "Hush now, Tom. Don't let us talk of anything but what is nice and pleasant. The other things can wait."
- "All right, we won't. Kitty, when we are married, you must always wear black gowns with white lace on them, like that one you had on this morning."

- "Did you like it?"
- "I should think so, rather. I never saw you in anything that suited you so well."
- "And it happens to be the dress that I like best. But oh, Tom, I should cost a fortune if I wore that sort of thing always? You can't think how unlucky I am with my clothes, and how soon I make them shabby. I have a knack of catching on all the nails and knobs and things that stick out, somehow."
- "Well, we can have a change sometimes, of course; but that is what you must wear whenever you want to be particularly swell."
- "I'm quite agreeable. Only you must make me a rather considerable allowance, I must tell you."
- "No, I don't believe in allowances. I shall give you a cheque-book of your own,

and you shall draw whatever you want, without being beholden to anybody. There should be no bargaining between husband and wife."

"If husbands did like that, Tom, I'm afraid the wives would get dreadfully demoralized. Why, I can't add up money at all—I don't know why, but I never could—and I should very likely ruin you without knowing it."

"How jolly it will be!" murmured Tom, meditatively.

"Being ruined?"

"No, being a husband, and having a wife. I suppose I shall come to England for you and we shall be married there. Mind now, Kitty, lots of men will want to make love to you when you get home and into society. Don't you let them, there's a good girl."

- "It doesn't matter what they do, I suppose, if I don't make love to them."
- "Doesn't it, though, by Jove! when I'm not there to send them about their business! Do you know, I'm sorry you haven't been out and got all that over. I should like to feel you had chosen me out of the whole world, as I have chosen you."
- "And pray haven't I? We'll wait, if you like, and not be engaged until I have gone through two or three London seasons—if mother lets me have London seasons, that is. I am quite ready."
- "No, you're not, Kitty; and you know that is nonsense. But oh, how long the time will be till I can come after you!"
- "To keep me out of mischief—as you said the other night."
  - "I didn't say that."
  - "Yes, you did-though not in so many

words, perhaps. Now, don't be a suspicious, jealous, disagreeable boy. If you can't trust me out of sight, I'm not worth having. And I promise you faithfully, Tom—I'm not afraid to take any 'solemn davy' you like—that a hundred thousand million men won't make any more difference in my love for you than if they weren't there."

Tom wriggled a little closer, and laid his head upon my shoulder; and Spring, for the first time catching sight of ducks, sent them with a sudden splash whirring up through the moonlight over our heads. We neither of us spoke for a little while, but held one another close, and sealed that sacred compact with a long and solemn kiss. We suddenly seemed to feel it a sort of sacrilege to talk. We looked up together at the delicate sky and the pale

stars, the tip of his auburn moustache brushing my cheek the while, and watched the flight of the wild-fowl until they were out of sight—one after another, all in line, like the ducks in Landseer's "Sanctuary," their black necks stretched out, and their active little pinions twinkling. It was a sweeter night than Friday night had been. The river was not low and stagnant now, with dry mud-banks, but rippling and brawling over its stones and snags, almost to our feet, fed anew with a freshet coming down from the Booloomooroo Ranges, where we had seen it raining in the afternoon. There were faint tints of dying daylight tingeing the moonshine that lay around us; and there were soft airs, fragrant with the scent of the refreshed earth and the springing grass, just breathing into our faces like the breath of life itself. No such airs ever blow in England, I think. Even the gum trees, ugly as they were—so far as Nature's works can be ugly—were transfigured in this light, rustling their scraggy and shadeless branches softly, and throwing patterns on my white gown.

I was the first to break the spell of happy silence in which we sat. "Tom," I said, "when will you come to England for me?"

"As soon as I can, my darling; you may be sure of that. I must talk to my father about it, and hear what Mr. Chamberlayne says."

"Can't you persuade Mr. Smith to sell out, as father is doing, and settle in England, too?"

"I don't think there is any chance of that. You see, my mother is not like yours; she hates England, and wouldn't go back there for anything."

"What an odd thing! And yet she never seems to have belonged to the colony a bit."

"No more she does. But something some dreadful trouble, I think—happened to her at home. I don't know what it was; it was long ago-when she was married before; or, at any rate, before she married my father. I know the governor came out and invested everything they both had in the colony, to please her. Moreover, she has chosen the place where she wants to be buried—in that open space in the clump of wattles at . the bottom of the garden. She is going to have an iron railing put round it; she drew the design herself. That looks as if she had made up her mind never to go away again."

"And she never told you what happened to make her exile herself in that way?"

"Never: she has plenty to say about most things, as you know; but if you once approach an allusion to her early life she is as mum as anything—shuts up like a box. Do you remember that mysterious party in Lady Georgiana Fullerton's novel 'Too Strange not to be True?' I often think she is like her."

"But of course your father knows all about it."

"Oh yes, of course he knows. But he never lets anything out any more than she does. I have been a little inquisitive sometimes, and asked him questions; but it always worried him awfully, poor old boy, so I gave it up. But I'm quite sure that here they will both stay—as long as she lives, at any rate."

"Then what will you do, Tom?"—very sorrowfully. "You are their only child, and it would break their hearts to part with you."

"Yes, I must not leave them for long. I must just run home to get married, and bring you back with me, Kitty. I hope it won't be very hard on you, dear. We'll have a house in Melbourne for part of the year, if you like; I won't keep you always in the bush. And when the poor old people are gone, then we'll live in any part of the world you like best. I don't care a pin for the colony except for their sakes."

"And I don't care a pin where I live,"
I responded, "so long as we are together."
So we talked and talked, until it suddenly occurred to us that Mr. and Mrs.
Smith might be wanting to go home, and

would have no idea where their young coachman was gone to. Then we scrambled from our nest in the green bank, called Spring, who had forgotten it was Sunday, from his very secular engagements, and set off, hand in hand, through our Champs Elysées—oh, so loth to be convinced that our happy day was so nearly at an end!

When we reached home, we saw the Smith's buggy with the hood up, standing ready in the stable yard, and Joe at the horses' heads. In the drawing-room our elders, with the exception of Mrs. Smith, were standing about; and she was sitting on a sofa, in her old poke bonnet and her lovely old Indian shawl, with gloved hands folded before her, looking as if she might have been waiting any number of hours.

"I hope I am not behind time," began Tom (he would no more have put his mother to inconvenience than he would the Queen, if he could help it). "I thought you would want a good long talk with Mrs. Chamberlayne, as there are so few Sundays left."

My mother, who had evidently been on the watch for my approach, laid her hand upon my shoulder, and said gravely, "My dear, where have you been? I greatly dislike your running about in this way so late at night."

"Don't blame Kitty," put in Tom, turning quickly to defend me; "it was my fault, Mrs. Chamberlayne. The night was so lovely that I persuaded her to come out for a walk." And then I suppose he thought it was time to "settle with them," as he called it; for he drew father a little aside,

and asked him if he would be disengaged any time the following day, as he wanted particularly to speak to him.

"Certainly, certainly, my dear boy," replied father, in blissful ignorance. "Any time after lunch that you like. You'd better come to lunch, eh?"

"I'll come at three o'clock, or thereabouts," said Tom, "if that will be convenient to you."

And then they all went out to the buggy, father leading the way with Mrs. Smith, and mother monopolizing both the remaining men. I trailed after them at a respectful distance, waiting for an opportunity to say good night.

With the reins in one hand, Tom turned back and held out the other to me, before mounting into his seat. "Good night, Kitty," he said aloud; and then, stooping

his tall head, he whispered hurriedly, "Look out for me when I leave the presence-chamber to-morrow."

"No fear," I replied promptly. And I was very thankful, as soon as I had made use of that vulgar expression, that mother had not been near enough to hear it. My feelings were too strong for me, and it slipped out unawares.

## CHAPTER V.

## DESPAIR.

MOTHER had a suspicion of what was going on, but she held her tongue and made no sign. She kissed me as usual when I went to bed, and when I got up in the morning, and then went about her preparations as busily as before. Father was silent and pre-occupied, and extremely affectionate and gentle to me, and his manner led me to believe that she had given him an idea of what Tom was probably coming for, and that he was thinking about it. But I dared not say or do anything to provoke him to disclose his thoughts.

Luncheon was late to-day for some reason, and we did not rise from table until nearly three o'clock. As soon as I could escape, I went to my own room and locked the door, and tried to straighten my somewhat untidy drawers and cupboards, while I impatiently waited to know my I heard Tom open and shut the gate, and heard his long stride over the gravel, his leap up the verandah steps, and his peculiar authoritative knock at the front door. I heard Bridget ask him into the drawing-room; I heard father go in after him and close the door; and, two minutes later, mother's dress rustled up the hall, and she, too, followed them, and softly shut herself in. I left the door of my wardrobe open, with all manner of garments tumbling off the shelves; and I flung myself on my knees by the bedside,

and prayed that things might be permitted to go well for us—by which I meant, of course, the way we wanted them to go.

I stayed on my knees I can't tell how long, after my prayer was done, listening; and I heard no sound. Then I got up, washed my face and hands, and raged round and round the room, making handcuffs of the towel. Then I stole into the passage; then I stole back again; and then I snatched up my hat, and ran out through the garden into the paddock, where I took up my post under an overhanging acacia hedge to wait for my lover's coming. I sat here so long that I was afraid I had missed him, which dreadful thought prompted me to run back, post haste, to the house. Meeting Bridget in a passage, I breathlessly inquired if Mr. Smith was gone; and Bridget smirked

in a confidential manner, and said, "No, miss, not yet." Whereupon I again shut myself into my bedroom, with the door ajar, and felt that if this sort of thing went on much longer I should have to invade the presence-chamber myself.

At last mother came out, and, by the sound of her dress, I knew she was approaching my citadel. I held my breath while she paused and tapped at the door. "Kitty, my dear, are you here?"

I flung out of the room then, and threw myself into her arms. "Oh, mother, mother, tell me! What does father say?" I cried, with almost hysterical excitement. "Is it all right for Tom and me?"

"Tom has asked to be allowed to tell you about it himself," she replied gently, but with a tremor in her voice. "You may go to him, Kitty; he is in the drawing-room, waiting for you. I can trust you both."

"Trust us!" I echoed, puzzled at the bare idea of such a thing.

"My dear," mother went on, very earnestly and lovingly, with an appealing look in her soft eyes, "if you don't find things quite as you wish, you must remember that your father and I have done what is best for you. We know what is good for you better than you can know yourself." A vague chill struck me as she spoke, and I begged her to tell me, in plain words, what had been settled.

"No; go and talk to Tom," she said; "he will explain everything. I will give you half an hour to yourselves."

I broke away from her at once, and ran to the drawing-room, and shut the door after me. Tom was standing with his back to a table, and supporting himself on it, with his hands behind him, gazing out of the window with such a sad and thoughtful look in his face as I had never seen before. He turned when he heard me, and I ran into his arms and laid my head on his shoulder, passionately determined that nothing should ever part us, if I could help it.

"Well, Kitty," he said, stroking my hair, "we have half an hour of our own. Let us make the most of it, for it is the last we shall get."

"What has happened? What have they done?" I cried piteously.

"They have driven a hard bargain with us, dear; but we must submit to it, as it is for your sake. We are not to be engaged, Kitty, for a couple of years at the least, until you have been 'out,' and have seen the world a little. Your father thinks you have taken to me because there was no one else, perhaps, and that you are too young to know your own mind."

"Oh, what nonsense! Why didn't you tell them different, Tom?"

"My love, I did all I could to keep you, you may be quite sure. But fathers and mothers are hard to deal with in these matters. I couldn't talk them over; they had made up their minds."

Tears began to fill my eyes—tears of indignation, as well as of bitter disappointment and grief. "But they didn't say we were *never* to have one another, did they?" I inquired, searching for a ray of hope.

"No, Kitty, thank goodness! They had no objection to me personally——"

"I should think not, indeed! I don't

know what they want, if you're not good enough—the Prince of Wales, perhaps."

"The Prince of Wales is married already, Kitty; and I don't think he would make you a better husband than I should, if he weren't. No, I may have my chance, like any other man, only I must wait all this awful long time for it. How I shall do it, goodness only knows!"

"You may come home in two years, then, and we may be properly engaged?"

"Yes; if you are in the same mind, Kitty, and have not forgotten my existence. No fear of my not coming to claim the only privilege I could get out of them."

"But, don't you see, Tom, it comes to much the same thing after all. Fortunately, we understood one another before they knew anything about it, and we can't undo that. We are engaged between ourselves, and we know in our own hearts that we could never give one another up. Of course we can submit quietly—outwardly, you know. Indeed, we have no choice in the matter, it appears; we must submit. I need not wear any ring, and I wouldn't talk about you, or anything of that sort; but we can write to one another, and that will be a comfort. I will buy a quantity of the thinnest foreign paper that is made, and the finest steel pens, and keep a sort of diary for you of everything that happens, to post every mail; and you can do the same."

"But, Kitty-"

"Oh, Tom, don't let us mind! It would have been worse if you had gone to father first, and he had forbidden you to propose to me. We must have been quite parted

then, for, of course, I couldn't have written to you. But now the mail every month will be something to look forward to, though the months will seem like years. And we shall always have the feeling of knowing that we belong to each other, whatever happens." Tom sat down on a sofa near us, and drew me into his arms. There was a solemnity in the way he did it that made me stop talking.

"My darling," he said, sorrowfully, smoothing my hair in that tender way he had, "you don't know the worst of it. They have put me upon my honour not to bind you in any way."

"I bind myself," I replied shortly.

"I'm not to allow you to be engaged, in any sense, Kitty."

"But if I choose to consider myself so, that is my own business."

- "Well, I only hope that you will consider yourself so, and keep yourself for me. That is all I shall have to live on, Kitty, remember that. But in the mean time—in the mean time we have to do just exactly as if we were utter strangers."
- "You don't mean we are not to write?"

  "Yes, I do. I begged and prayed for half an hour, I should think, that we might be allowed to write sometimes, but your mother was more inexorable about that than about anything else. She said—and quite truly, of course—that it would be an admission of an engagement between us, and hinder you from having perfect freedom."
- "What do I want with perfect freedom? What does mother know about it, dictating to us like that? Why are we to be treated so—as if we were two babies?" I cried,

in a passion of anger and grief. "You had no business to give in to her, Tom. If you really wanted to keep me you ought to have stood out against such tyranny."

There was an ominous pause, during which I repented myself of this outburst. "Kitty," he said at last, in a grave, shocked voice that chilled my heart, "that is the hardest thing I have had to bear to-day."

"I did not mean to say it, Tom; I did not think before I spoke! I know you did your best for us both," I sobbed, dreadfully sorry to have hurt him, and beginning to feel quite broken down under such an accumulation of misfortunes. "Oh, Tom, what shall we do? what shall we do? How shall I live for two years without knowing whether you are alive or dead

even?" Two years at my time of life was tantamount to for ever.

"You shall know that, at any rate," he replied, rousing himself to comfort me. "And the time will not be so long as you think, especially as it will be so filled up in England. We shan't be grey-haired or decrepid when we meet again. After all, you won't be twenty-one."

I went on crying in silence; I could not stop yet now I had fairly begun. Tom laid my head on his breast, and laid his cheek on my head, and then let me alone for a while that I might have it out. Presently he said, "What's the day of the month, Kitty?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I whined dismally.

"Well, I'll tell you; it's my birthday. All this business put it out of my head, and I forgot to mention it before. It is my twenty-fourth birthday. Now, cheer up, dear, and listen to me. On this day two years—the day I am twenty-six—I'll meet you in England, wherever you are. When you get up in the morning, you may feel sure you will meet me somewhere before night."

"Oh, Tom, what a happy day! but it will never, never come. I might be dead—we might both be dead—before that."

"Don't talk of such dreadful things, child; don't make matters worse than they are. Let us trust one another, and trust in God to keep us safely till we meet again. Let us look forward to that day, Kitty. Nothing shall hinder me from coming to you, unless my father or mother should be ill, or anything should happen, of course, which it would be quite impossible

to help. Only sheer force shall keep me from you, after the time when our two years are up."

"But if you should be kept, Tom?"

"I shall provide for that possible, though most improbable, contingency, by writing to you beforehand, under cover to your father, and asking him to give you the letter at night, if I have not turned up during the day. He has trusted me, and I can trust him."

Here our conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, and it struck us simultaneously that we must have much exceeded our half-hour.

- "Yes?" interrogated Tom loudly.
- "I want you, Kitty," replied mother's low, clear voice; and we rose from the sofa together, and stood clasped in each other's arms.

"God bless you, my own dear love," he whispered, as I received his parting kiss in floods of tears. "Remember, you are no longer bound to me, except by your love."

"I shall be bound by that always, Tom; and you must never believe anything else, whatever people may tell you. Come for me on your birthday, and you will find me ready for you."

"I will—I will! And now I must go, darling—I will go out by the verandah, for I can't see anybody else just now. Apologize to your mother for me."

"And what about to-morrow, Tom, and next day, and all the time till we go?"

"We shall meet sometimes, I suppose, Kitty, but we must not have any walks by ourselves any more."

Mother's knock came again, more peremp-

tory than before, and we had to tear ourselves apart. Tom got his hat and went out by the window, a sadder man than he had been when he came, poor fellow; and I opened the door and flounced past mother, with flashing eyes and my nose in the air, and, regaining the shelter of my own chamber, flung myself on my bed, and cried as if my heart would break.

## CHAPTER VI.

## TOM SMITH'S FAMILY DIAMONDS.

I have often felt very sorry, and very much ashamed of myself, when I have thought of the way I treated my father and mother—particularly mother—at this time. I seldom spoke to either of them; and when I did, without being exactly impertinent, I contrived to frame my remarks in as unpleasant a form as possible, so that they might get no satisfaction out of them. I showed them no tender observances, beyond the regulation kiss morning and night, into which I infused

as much indifference and formality as I decently could. I sat at table during meals with my head poised proudly in the air, and studiously refrained from smiling when father made his little jokes, and from gratifying mother by the slightest appearance of interest when she chattered of her English preparations and plans. I was too proud to be pettish, and tell her that I wished, as Caddy Jellaby did about America, that England was dead, which would have expressed my sentiments clearly in a simple form; but by a disparaging silence, or an implied disbelief in the infallible accuracy of her memory, or an ostentatious display of colonial prejudices, I did what in me lay, with considerable ingenuity, to take the flavour out of all her pleasant anticipations. They knew what it meant as well as I did, and

they bore it with a patient gentleness that I do not now like to think of. Only when my ill-temper betrayed me into ill-manners, mother brought me to my senses with her customary directness; but they took all my covert slights with such a delicate forbearance that they would not even let me see that they noticed them. What hurt them most, I am sure, was my refusal to be talked to and reasoned with respecting the condition of my love affairs. Mother made several efforts to open the subject, and I always stubbornly declined to respond to them. I made her see that I expected no true sympathy from parents who could treat their only child in such a cruel fashion; and that since it would be impossible to understand one another's feelings, the fewer confidences we indulged in the better. When she gave me

lick my face, and grovel on the skirts of my best dresses—by way of giving my parents to understand that, if no one else cared about me, here, at least, I had one true friend.

Poor father and mother! If they had done their duty in the matter, as I feel sure was the case, they had to be satisfied with virtue for its own reward. It was all the reward they got. For, besides this difference amongst ourselves, there sprang up a coolness with Mr. and Mrs. Smith. course these old people considered (and a perfect right they had to do so) that there was no one in the world to compare with their son; and, of course, they felt it a great indignity that my parents had not shown themselves overwhelmed with delight at getting the chance of such a husband for a little chit like me. They were both too well-bred to express this sentiment, either by speech or manner; but they entertained it cordially all the same.

The first outward change occurred on Sunday, when we all met at church again, after that long, empty, wretched week. The Smiths arrived there first on this occasion; the old people were in their places, and Tom, of course, was in the choir. When I saw him there, on entering the porch at mother's heels (and our eyes met at once in an intense and solemn look of welcome), I took a sudden resolution to follow my parents up the aisle, and seat myself demurely in the family pew beside I was quite sure they did not wish me to leave the choir because Tom was there; on the contrary, it would be very repugnant to mother's delicacy to make such a public demonstration. But it was highly gratifying to me to show them that I supposed, as a matter of course, that I was to keep as far away from him as space permitted. It made them look like tyrants, and me like an interesting martyr, to the whole Smith family, if to no one else; and of course the villagers found a topic for gossip and speculation in such a mysterious established habits. departure from our When we went out to the buggies, father shook hands with Tom cordially, and with his old friends, and then, with visible embarrassment, but ostentatious warmth, he offered the stereotyped invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

The old lady, with her little figure, and her delicate face that was like a carving in ivory, received it with the gentle dignity of a dowager empress. "Not to-day, I thank you, Mr. Chamberlayne," she replied. "We have allowed so many of the servants to have a Sunday out to-day that we are wanted at home to keep house."

Of course it was a polite excuse, and father knew it. Mother would have accepted it, and said no more, but he could not help blundering on, even to the extent of mentioning Tom by name as included in the invitation. Of course he got nothing by it except a distressed feeling that things were somehow all wrong. "I want to have a talk with you," he urged, in quite a pleading tone; "I have been looking forward to to-day to talk matters all over."

"Another time, Mr. Chamberlayne, another time," she replied, with a touch of asperity in her polite, high-pitched tones. She made it evident to him, at last, that she did not intend to accept his hospitality,

as heretofore; and he left off pressing her.

Tom, during this time, had been quietly harnessing his horses; and now he handed his mother into her seat, saw his father tucked up beside her, mounted the box, and gathered his reins together. "Good morning, Mrs. Chamberlayne; good-bye, Kitty," he called in a quiet, clear voice as he raised his hat to us. "Mr. Chamberlayne, I will leave the gates open for you." And away they drove, and were soon out of sight.

Poor father fumbled at his harness, flurried and silent, cut to the heart, I knew, by this sad change in the familiar custom of years. I don't know anything that could have hurt him so much as the refusal of his old friends to eat his dinner. Mother, too, looked sad and dispirited;

and, altogether, we were by no means a cheerful party. "Oh how different it was last Sunday!" I said to myself over and over again.

When we reached our own house how the sight of the well-spread table smote us. There were the six places set, as they had been set nearly every Sunday for I don't know how long (for the Smiths, like us, were most punctual church-goers), and the fat turkey, and the monstrous round of beef, the portly ham, the piled-up bowl of salad—all the plentiful dishes of the regular "cold collection," as Tom called it, which was prepared for Sunday, mocked us with their now absurd abundance. When mother rang the bell, and ordered the potatoes to be brought in, Bridget stood still and looked at her, with mouth and eyes open, wondering what had happened.

We did not sit over our dinners on this occasion; nor did we on the Sunday following, when we again dined alone, with no leaf put into the table. But, after that, the little differences between the two families were swallowed up in the sorrow that came upon them both in their now fast-approaching separation. Our house was by this time getting disorganized and upset. Travelling-boxes and packingcases, and messes of all sorts, were strewn about the dainty rooms, which were stripped of ornaments and curtains, and sometimes of carpets also-one or two of these latter, which had been made to order for us in England, and some Persian rugs, being too precious and pretty to part with. Mother's best glass and china were heaped on a table, to be no more used at Narraporwidgee; her linen closet was emptied and

its contents spread in neat piles on her bedroom floor, all her hoards of household treasures were like drapers' goods at stocktaking time; she could not bear to have her "sets" meddled with, and we had not things to use that we wanted. We were just beginning to feel very desolate and uncomfortable, when one morning after breakfast old Mrs. Smith drove up to the door and begged us, with tears in her eyes, to come and make our home at Booloomooroo until the sale was over and it was time to start for Melbourne. Mother, who went to the door herself, put her arms round her old friend, kissed her warmly, and accepted the invitation; and the day after we found ourselves transferred from our mess and muddle to cool, sweet, orderly rooms again; and any breach there might have been between the two families was healed up.

It was very strange and pleasant to find myself under the same roof with my proscribed lover, meeting him familiarly at all hours of the day. Many precious, if brief, moments of happy privacy fell to us in the accidental course of things; but we were honourable, and we did not seek them. We took no walks, we contrived no stolen interviews; we played whist and billiards with our parents during those lovely evenings when we should have chosen to be out of doors, with the utmost propriety though, I believe, if we had done otherwise in those last days, father and mother would have carefully shut their eyes and have taken no notice. Every day some of us went over to Narraporwidgee with a luncheon basket, and stayed there until Sometimes Tom went too, dinner-time. and helped mother to lift and carry, and

123

to do the rough part of her packing, or helped father with his outdoor arrangements. On these occasions I seldom accompanied them, though mostly left to please myself, but stayed with Mrs. Smith.

Between Mrs. Smith and me there existed at this time a close attachment. I took no care to avoid hurting my dear mother by an ostentatious display of affectionate attentiveness to her; but, at the same time, there was a decided clandestine element in our intercourse. When we were alone we had long talks about Tom, and exchanged confidences that neither of us shared with anybody else. I made Mrs. Smith understand and believe that I should never love another man, if I lived to be a hundred, and that I should consider myself as good as married to him all the two years that we were to be separated; and, in return,

Mrs. Smith assured me that his heart had been bound up in me ever since we were boy and girl together, and that she had long looked forward to having me for her daughter some day. She was a chatty old body, very imperious, very highly accomplished, and well versed in the ways of the polite world, in spite of the length of time that she had been absent from it; and she interested me in the profoundest manner with the few glimpses she gave me of the life she had so long done with, which I was just beginning.

We used to sit in her bedroom mostly, which was as peculiar as she was herself. Two or three of the original chambers had been thrown together to make it, and it was in the shape of a letter L. Her sleeping and dressing apparatus was in one limb of the apartment, and the other was

filled with couches, tables, cabinets, very old armchairs, and all the appliances of an ancient boudoir. Such queer old chintz the curtains and sofa covers were made of; such spidery legs supported such curious articles of furniture, the like of which I never saw before or since. I often used to think how beautifully they must have been packed to have stood the voyage from England so many years ago, especially considering what ramshackle old ships they had in those times. Over the chimneypiece there were some comical little silhouettes and miniatures in ebony and brass frames; and one day I got up from my chair to study them carefully, while she counted the stitches of a long piece of knitting, with her gold-rimmed spectacles on her thin aquiline nose.

"I suppose these are Tom's ancestors,"

I said presently; "but I can't find the faintest resemblance in any of them to him."

"You have not looked well. That lady with the powdered hair was as like what he is now as a delicate woman could be like a large strong man; and in that old soldier, with all the orders on his breast, you will also see his very image."

I certainly did not see anything of the sort. Two more absurd frumps never were limned by any painter, and to compare Tom with them was simply preposterous. However, I supposed the originals were better-looking than the portraits, and that her memory was truer than her eyes.

"Are any of these you?" I asked, after a fruitless search for the rudiments of her striking face. She pointed with her knitting-pin to a fat-cheeked child, with a great shock of hair and no clothes to speak of, than which anything less resembling the stately delicacy and dignity of that aristocratic old lady could not possibly be conceived.

"But I have another," said she, laying down her work and taking off her spectacles. "I have long been intending to show it to you, my dear, and also some other things that I hope will be yours some day."

With which she went to an ancient Indian cabinet, unlocked it, and, pointing to a modern Chubb safe, wedged into a place that had evidently been cleared for it out of a labyrinth of tiny shelves, drawers, and cupboards, asked me to be good enough to carry it to a table for her. I did so, in great curiosity, and she drew up her chair before it.

"Lock the door, Kitty, and then come and sit by me," she said with an air of solemn preparation that quite awed me. This done (though we were quite alone in that part of the house), we sat down to our investigations.

First she took out a tray of many compartments, which was covered with a thick layer of cotton wool; then another similar tray, then a third; and this she began to uncover at one corner.

"Here is the miniature," she said, drawing it out. "Now, Kitty, if you do marry Tom, and these become yours, I should be much obliged to you if you would keep this just as it is, and instruct your eldest son to do so also. The others you can reset as you please. You don't mind promising me that?"

"Oh, of course not, Mrs. Smith,—what-

ever you wish," I stammered earnestly, with the reddest red face I ever had in my life, as I took the jewel from her. It was a jewel, indeed. The miniature, which was done on ivory, with the finish of a mediæval missal painting, was of a lovely, smiling, fair-haired girl—one of the sweetest little pictures I ever looked upon; but I hardly could look at it, for the ring of great diamonds in which it was framed, which positively made my eyes ache.

"Oh—oh!" I cried out in ecstasy, "Was there ever such a locket!"

"Plenty, my dear," the old lady replied carelessly, "only you have not been in the way to see them. But these stones are much finer than most, certainly. I don't suppose you will see much better ones when you go into society."

I looked and looked, and sighed, and vol. 1.

looked again, perfectly fascinated by this blazing splendour, and all the curious workmanship about it, until she took it from my hand and laid it back in its nest.

"Here are the others," she said, drawing off the sheet of wool and pushing the tray before me.

I did not want any bribing to keep faith with Tom, but many a woman, I fancy, would have had an imperative inducement to do so, whether she cared for him or not, in the prospect of becoming possessed of such diamonds as those. Earrings, pins, stars, buckles, necklace, tiara, bracelets, and brooches. All quaintly fashioned in their old silver settings, but thickly studded with great, pure drops of liquid light, rimmed all about with sparks of fire. I was speechless, almost stunned, with admiration and astonishment.

"They are a fine set," said Mrs. Smith, composedly, as she fingered them with her slender ivory hands; "but they will want resetting before you can wear them. Don't let them use gold, my dear; that is what they do nowadays, but it is often only a device to hide a want of pure colour in the stones. I would keep them in silver if I were you."

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, it seems such a preposterous thing for me to think of ever wearing those!"

"They will be in their most suitable place when worn by my son's wife," she replied, with dignity. "They did not come from Mr. Smith's side, you understand, Kitty; I inherited them, by special bequest. And I should have been grieved," she added, with a sigh, "to have left them to just anybody—a woman I had never

seen—who, perhaps, would be unworthy to wear them. Though," correcting herself, "I can trust my son not to marry an unworthy woman."

I threw my arms round the old lady's neck, and kissed her eagerly. "If ever I have them I will value them, and take care of them as never diamonds were taken care of before," I cried, almost in tears; "but oh, dear Mrs. Smith, you think I am good enough for Tom, and that is more to me than all the diamonds, lovely as they are."

"My dearest child, if I live for two years longer, to see you and him made happy, I shall not have much more to live for," she responded, tenderly. "Be assured I think you good enough for Tom, and the only girl good enough that I have ever met with. There, there, don't cry!

Let us look at the other jewels now. They are not much, compared with the diamonds, of course; but there are some very fine stones amongst them—particularly emeralds."

So we investigated the remaining trays and compartments, and inspected all the lesser jewels, which, without the diamonds, would have been a splendid possession in the eyes of a reasonable woman—emeralds, opals, rubies, sapphires, strings of pearls, antique watches, lovely cameos and mosaic work, and all sorts of things. Out of these she presently selected a curious and beautiful Maltese cross, and laid it on the table before me. It was of silver, though not much silver was to be seen; there was a large emerald in each of its points, and all the rest was filled in with little diamonds as thickly as they would lie

together. She hunted amongst a heap of chains until she found one that would suit it—a chain made of little beads of silver, with a spark of diamond between each bead; and on this she slipped the ring of the Maltese cross, and fastened them round my neck.

"It is not a marriage gift, as the others will be, Kitty," she said; "this is a little token of friendship from an old woman who has loved you and yours better than she ever expected to love anybody again;" and here her voice changed, and she sighed heavily.

"How lovely! How exquisite! How beautiful!" I murmured, quite overcome with grateful emotion. "Oh, Mrs. Smith, how I shall value it! How very good you are to me!"

"Tchut! - nonsense!" she replied,

brusquely. "It is nothing to make a fuss about. Not but what," she added, "it is a fine jewel in its way. It was given to me by a princess, and those eight emeralds are such as you won't see often. Put it on to-night, and let Tom see it; it will please him, dear boy. And, Kitty, whenever you wear it let it remind you, my love, of your promise to him, and all you and I have talked about."

"It shall—it shall!" I replied, earnestly, "though I shall not need any reminding, dear Mrs. Smith."

The buggy returned late that evening from Narraporwidgee, and I did not meet my parents and Tom until the gong summoned us all to the dining-room. Here I presented myself in my best black silk dress that Tom liked so much, the bosom of which, fitting to me like a soft glove,

without a wrinkle or any kind of trimming, made what I considered the most effective background for my chain and cross, which in lamplight glittered in the most amazing manner. I had been standing before my looking-glass to admire myself for about a quarter of an hour beforehand, waving a candle backwards and forwards in front of me: and never till now did I know what fire could burn in the depths of pure emeralds. Even that mass of well-cut and perfect little diamonds, in themselves "enemies of mankind," as Mr. Ruskin calls them, of the most "destructive" character, could not overpower the intense glow and lustre of mine. My unwonted magnificence caught the attention of everybody, down to the sedate butler who waited at table, as soon as I approached the light. Mrs. Smith looked at me in complacent triumph; her husband, whose life was spent in looking at her, withdrew his gaze from that object for a second, and then returned it with extra interest. Mother regarded me with a startled surprise; father with an astonished "Hallo, Kitty!" and Tom with beaming satisfaction.

"That cross hasn't seen the light for a dozen years at least, Kitty," said Tom. "Have you given it to Kitty, mother?"

"Yes, my dear; it is a little keepsake-Kitty has been good enough to accept," she replied demurely. Whereupon he stooped over her chair and kissed her.

Mother called me round the table, and, taking the jewel in her hand, examined it closely, and as she did so the colour rose in her pale face. "It is much too valuable for a young girl like Kitty," she said, turning troubled eyes to Mrs. Smith. "Why, these stones must be quite priceless."

"They are very fair stones," our hostess replied coolly, beginning to ladle out the soup; "but they are not at all too good for Kitty. It gives me great pleasure to see her wearing them; they will be something to remind her of old friends when she is far away from us."

"She is so very, very careless," began mother again; but here I broke in to ask her indignantly if she supposed I should be careless of such a thing as that?

"I will give you a little Chubb to keep it in, Kitty," said father, with moist eyes. "I don't think Mrs. Smith need be afraid of it's not being well taken care of; the child is not likely to have many such treasures of her own. But I do think Poor father and mother! they thought Mrs. Smith had been making over Tom's inheritance to me, thereby implying that she regarded me as his future wife. They knew nothing of the existence of that treasure of diamonds in the Indian cabinet, compared with which this was almost a trifle. Tom, who guessed what we had been about during the afternoon, looked across at me significantly when father spoke, and then we both looked at our plates, and I blushed furiously.

I was coming out of my bedroom earlier in the evening, having gone to fetch some music, when I met him striding along the passage on his way to his usual nightly interview with the overseer. We did not think it wrong to stop and indulge ourselves in a fervent hug and kiss.

"I am so glad mother has given you something out of that old iron box," he said, touching my precious cross. "Now, you mind what your father said, Kitty, and don't take it out of the family."

"No fear of that," I answered, nestling up to him. "It will stand to me in the place of my engagement ring, Tom. Only I can't wear it always, unfortunately."

"Wear it that day when we meet in England, Kitty, will you? Then, when I see it round your dear white throat, it will be a sign to me that you have kept true, and are ready for me."

"I will," I said solemnly.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## ON THE MAIL STEAMER.

Our final departure from the colony was a wretched business, and I do not feel inclined to dwell upon it. The Smiths and ourselves had never known until now how strong were the bonds of friendship that through long years had bound us together, and Tom and I bitterly realized what a tremendous probation ours was going to be. It was sad to see our pretty home, that had grown with my growth, and was a monument of I know not what ingenuity and contrivance, dismantled and stripped,

and given up to strangers. It was a trial to hear, when the sale was over, that my beloved piano had been carted away to the township for the butcher's children to strum upon; and that our drawing-room furniture, which had been made for us in England, was gone to adorn a publichouse. It was a sore grief to have to part with Spring and Bronzewing, neither of my pets being allowed to accompany me home, of course.

Spring I gave to Tom to take care of, and so I was assured of his welfare, though the poor old dog whined and cried at leaving me until he almost broke my heart; but Bronzewing was too famous and too valuable to be disposed of in any such sentimental manner. He was put up to auction, and was fought for by two or three wealthy landowners in the district,

one of whom purchased him for a sum that was sufficient, father said, to cover the cost of whatever finery mother and I might choose to treat ourselves to in Paris.

I parted from Tom at Booloomooloo, standing out in the public sunshine between the doorsteps and the buggy. Our four parents were gathered round us, all more or less overcome, on their own account, by the solemnity and sadness of the occasion, and in the midst of them we stood tight clasped in one another's arms, and kissed our hearts out in the bitter sweetness of farewell. We were past caring what they or anybody else thought of it. My own father and mother preserved a grave silence towards me for hours after we had started; but if they had raged and stormed it would have been all the same. I should rather have enjoyed

it than otherwise, in the defiant and despairing mood that I was then in.

During all our buggy and railway stages, and our little sojournings here and there, en route to Melbourne and the mail steamer, I was too profoundly miserable to see, or feel, or care for anything. But my natural vivacity, and the spirit of enterprise that always possessed me more or less, awoke in spite of me under the novel conditions of sea life. At the end of a fortnight or three weeks I had revived sufficiently to take a vigorous interest in my fellowpassengers, and to scandalize mother by a special partiality for a bearded young Queenslander who taught me to play chess. I was no good at chess, and gave no signs of promise that I ever should be. head was not of that construction which the intricacies of the game demanded.

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But the learning of the moves, and of a few rudimental calculations, was a pleasant occupation when the teacher was so exceptionally agreeable. I thought it was very hard on me when mother objected to two or three games of chess a day, just when I was beginning to find a little amusement to drown the thought of all my troubles—until, to my unspeakable and disgust, the Queensland surprise gentleman made me an offer of marriage; which unpleasant incident, occurring on board ship, was unavoidably one of the widest public interest. This happened before we reached Galle, and threw me back into my original low spirits for a day or two. I recovered myself when we came to anchor in that levely port, and I found myself furnished with unlimited pocket-(surreptitiously, from father's money VOL. I.

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pockets) for all the charming native rubbish that I cared to purchase. the addition of a number of little Indian children to our passenger-list made the rest of the voyage delightful. I am glad to say my rejected lover took himself off (though I was really very sorry for some things to see him go) and sought distraction in the pleasures of the chase with some coffee-planting acquaintances. and my little friends had no restraint upon our intercourse. There were some dear little girls, coming home with an invalid mother and no servant, to whom I particularly attached myself. I washed their hands and faces, and saw that their little wants were not overlooked at their own table; and we played together all day long, whensoever we had an opportunity. They were precocious little things, and not

very strong, and had no idea of romping; so we entertained ourselves with quiet games.

One day we were absorbed in our favourite amusement—"keeping shop." A sort of barricade was built up of chairs in a retired spot of deck, to represent the counter; the two little sisters sat on cushions on one side, and I knelt on the other, displaying scarfs, and veils, and handkerchiefs as my stock-in-trade.

"And what can I show you to-day, madam?" I inquired of the elder child, with much ceremony, when we had arranged ourselves to our satisfaction.

She considered for a moment, with her wise little face full of importance, and then she asked for some pink satin for a ball dress. I immediately spread out a snuff-coloured pocket-handkerchief of

daddy's, and she passed it through her little fingers, knitted her brows, shook her head; and when I told her it was cheap at £16 a yard, said she was afraid it was not good enough. Acting on this hint I produced a gossamer veil, which I told her was a very sweet thing in satins, that I thought I could let her have, as a favour, for £500 the dress. "It is a piece that was made for the Duchess of Edinburgh," I explained confidentially; "only the Duchess found that she really had so many dresses in her trousseau that she would never have an opportunity of wearing it."

The little one's face shone with delight at this announcement, and she consulted with her sister as to the advisability of securing such an undoubted bargain. Forty-seven yards was rather more than she required, she said; but I told her that was the quantity for a court dress with a train, and that of course I could not cut it. So she purchased the whole, and it was laid on one side; and then it was her sister's turn to be served. This little mite had been in a fever of impatience for the pink satin to be disposed of; and now she burst out breathlessly, "Please, I want some purple velvet—no, some crimson velvet—for a ball dress, and some diamond fringe to trim it with."

I gravely brought out a woollen scarf, and told her that that was the richest crimson velvet that was made. It was £200 a yard, but, of course, that was a mere trifle for such a superior article. She trembled with excitement as she poked her thin little finger through the holes in the knitting, and inquired anxiously whether

I was sure that it was quite the latest fashion.

"Oh dear, yes," was my unhesitating reply. "It is the most fashionable of all materials this season. The Queen sent for a dress exactly like this, only last week."

"It couldn't have been the Queen," broke in the elder child, who had been watching the proceedings critically. "Mamma says the Queen never wears anything but black."

"Dear me, no, of course not! What could I have been thinking of? It was the Princess of Wales I meant. The Princess wore it at a garden-party at Chiswick, and it was immensely admired. Crimson velvet has been quite the rage ever since."

"And diamond fringe?"

"Well, of course hers had diamond fringe, because she is a princess. She had a few of her spare boxes of diamonds made up on purpose, and she found she had just enough to trim the polonaise with, without having to touch her necklaces, and bracelets, and tiaras, and things. But diamond fringe is not generally worn, and I am afraid I have none by me just now. I can show you some pearl embroidery, if that will do, or some real Brussels lace."

As I turned to search for a strip of tatting in my workbag, which was to do duty for Brussels lace, I met the steady look of a pair of keen dark eyes, watching my proceedings from an embarrassingly short distance. They belonged to a gentlemanly, slight-framed man, whom I had not noticed before, and who must have

joined us a few days previously at Galle. He was leaning on the back of a friend's chair—the friend being elderly, and dozing over a magazine on his knee, with his chin so buried in his shirt front that his grey beard tickled his nose—and he was resting all his weight on his folded arms, and looked as if he had been watching me for any length of time. There was something in his face which (without taking any offensive liberty with mine) was so amused and so comical, and I myself felt so extremely silly, caught unawares at my childish games, that I could not help laughing. At this he took his arms from his chair back, and pulled off his hat hurriedly; and I, at the same moment, scrambled to my feet and tilted the counter over, to the consternation and disgust of my little customers.

"Oh," he exclaimed, taking two long steps into the "shop," and putting our apparatus in order again, "I am so sorry! I did not know I was an eavesdropper until you surprised me just now. I was so interested in the mimicry of your little companions, and to see you amusing them so prettily. Is not the child the mother of the woman, as well as the father of the man? I was just thinking that, when you turned round, and showed me how rude I was."

I have always considered that if gentle breeding shows itself in any physical peculiarity at all, it is in the quality and purity of one's voice and accent. Tom, though his voice was deep and sonorous, had that clear, incisive crispness of speech which is so expressively authoritative, as well as so musical to listen to; and my new friend,

with a more delicate and high-pitched organ, resembled him so much in the using of it that I was reminded of him at once, and felt kindly disposed in consequence.

"I deserved to be laughed at, and I am sure you could not help it."

"I was not laughing at you, I assure you," he said warmly. "I was wishing I had such a knack of interesting others, as you seem to interest everybody about you. These little ones would have had a very dreary time of it if you had not been on board. Wouldn't you?" he added, addressing the children, who were staring at him silently, with evident disfavour.

"Are you coming to keep shop?" the youngest inquired, gravely; "or do you want to buy anything? Because we don't keep gentlemen's things. Do we, Miss Chamberlayne?"

"No," I said, smiling; "the tailor's shop is over the way."

"I take the hint," he said, bowing slightly, as he lifted his hat, and showing a pleasant, thoughtful, friendly face, with thin dark hair a little worn away at the temples. And he sauntered to the far end of the deck, and was lost to our view, leaving me with an uneasy suspicion that I had been pert.

I did not see him again—except far away at the dinner-table — until next morning, when, having exhausted the treasures of imagination, in the shape of drapery and jewels, the little girls and I were engaged in a new game, paying calls upon one another in different parts of the ship. They had been to call on me in my cabin, where I had shown them photographs and given them cake and lemonade;

and now I was returning their call, sitting on the edge of my chair in a very hot patch of sunlight, with my card-case in my hand, while they gracefully reclined under the shade of the awning on two more chairs, which they vainly endeavoured to fill.

"And how did you leave the children, Mrs. Mortimer?" inquired my elder hostess. "I hope they are all quite well."

"Thank you, Mrs. Montgomery, they are all quite well, I am happy to say. Marie Antoinette had rather a bad fall downstairs this morning, and bruised her forehead; and Gustavus Adolphus ran away with a finger-glass last night when the butler was clearing the table after a large dinner-party, and fell down with it in the hall and cut himself; but I put a plaster on, and gave him a dose of castor oil, and he is all right again to-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ellie, the little one, with very round eyes, "do you give your children castor oil when they cut their fingers?"

"Certainly," I replied. "It is a new plan that was recommended to me, and I find it answers admirably; they don't cut themselves half so much as they used to do when I gave them cakes and lollies to make them stop crying. I should strongly advise you to try it the next time you have any accident amongst your little ones. By the way, how is your baby, Mrs. Trelawny? I met your nurse taking it for an airing in the carriage yesterday, and she said she was afraid it was cutting another tooth."

Little Ellie was gazing out to sea, full of perplexity about the castor oil; but at this interesting question her eyes came back to me sparkling with delight. "Yes," she said eagerly, "it cut a new tooth this morning. I heard it crying when I was in my boudoir, and I rang the bell for Mr. Trelawny, and asked him to send for the doctor. But he said 'nonsense,' so we didn't send, and baby got his tooth all by himself."

"My husband never says 'nonsense' to me," broke in the elder child, drawing herself up.

This unexpected remark upset my gravity, and I had to stifle a laugh in my pocket-handkerchief. At the same time I cast about in my mind for a new topic of conversation, and happily thought of servants. Before I could broach it, however, we were interrupted by our new acquaintance, who had evidently been hanging about at no great distance from us.

"Shall I be the footman?" he said, slightly lifting his hat to me, and addressing Mrs. Montgomery, "and show this lady out?" Before any of us could answer him, he approached my chair, and continued, in quite an altered tone, "Forgive me for interrupting you again, but I really am afraid you will risk a sunstroke if you sit here any longer with that heat pouring down upon your head."

I admitted that it was rather warm, and I got up from my chair, which he immediately removed to a shady place. And, though the little girls hoped he would go away again, he did not. To tell the truth, I did not want him to think that we wished to get rid of him (and I did not wish it); and I dare say he had the instinct to divine that, though I gave him no invitation to stay. He fell into a com-

fortable lounging attitude near me, and we began to talk—Mrs. Trelawny and Mrs. Montgomery nestling meanwhile upon my skirts, in silent indignation.

I hope I am not a flirt, or anything of that sort which I ought not to be. But sometimes I have my doubts. It is in my constitution, somehow, to like the society of men better than that of women; and nature, I am fain to hope, justifies herself in these matters, and does not leave us responsible. Whether it is that men are more intellectually entertaining, or more thoroughly cultured, or take more trouble to make things pleasant, I do not know; but it is certain that I have more interest, and find more sympathy (as a rule) in the conversation of my fellow-men than I do in that of my fellow-women — and particularly of my fellow-girls. I cannot help

it; nor, any less, can I help betraying my preferences. It is not in me to disguise my sentiments, though I have often tried to do so. Now I am telling the truth about it, I will say one thing in my own favour-I do not want men to make love to me, as flirts are said to do; and I am quite positively sure that I never consciously encourage them in that direction. If they will do it—and, unhappily, they will sometimes—it is very tiresome, of course; and no one suffers from it more than I do. It takes all the comfort from my intercourse with them for ever after, and deprives me of my pleasantest friendships just when they begin to be valuable. I consider this unfortunate infirmity of nice men the one great drawback to my enjoyment of their society.

I sat in a long-armed wicker chair, with vol. 1.

my hat off and my toes dangling, and had a delightful chat with my new acquaintance, undisturbed by any scruples as to the propriety of so doing. I knew (without thinking of it until long afterwards) that he was not a man to take liberties, or in any way to "forget his place;" and I could have no shadow of uneasiness, at this stage of our acquaintance, as to what it might develop into if it were followed up. Indeed, at this period of my career, I had not begun to reflect upon these matters—notwithstanding my experiences with respect to the gentleman from Queensland who had taught me chess. not yet occurred to me to dream of likening myself, even in the vaguest and most distant way, to a flirt, or to suppose for a moment that anybody else would presume to do so.

I told my new friend, in the frankest manner, where I had come from, and where I was going to, and what I hoped to do and see when I got there. I pointed out my father and mother from amongst the passengers—daddy hotly discussing politics with another Australian passenger—mother sitting with the invalid mother of my little girls, and reading aloud to her about lady helps; and, when I found that he was an Englishman, and had only been absent from his country for a few months, I induced him to enter into the fullest particulars as to what the life I looked forward to would probably have for me in the way of sight-seeing and general enjoyment. He was giving me a charming description of the "march-past" of the famous teams of the coaching club, and I was listening eagerly, unconscious of the flight of time,

when I suddenly caught sight of mother looking at me from over the top of her book, with a grave intentness that I found very disconcerting. As soon as I could I rose from my chair and went over to her, with my little companions holding fast to either hand.

- "Who is that gentleman, Kitty?" she asked quietly, looking away to where he now stood, with his arms folded on the railing, gazing out to sea. I was sorry she could only see a commonplace dark-blue back and legs, and nothing of the refinement of his pleasant face.
  - "I don't know, mother," I replied.
- "You don't know!" she echoed in astonishment, "Do you mean your father is not acquainted with him?"
- "I don't think so. No, I know he is not, for I showed him which was daddy just now."

- "Then who introduced him to you, dear?"
  - "Nobody."
  - "Don't you know his name?"
- "No," I murmured shamefacedly, beginning to see the drift of her questions.
- "Then, my dear child, will you remember another time that I object to your talking to strangers. It is not "—she hesitated, casting about for a word that would indicate impropriety without too plainly expressing it—"it is not good manners. He"—glancing again at the distant serge-clad figure by the railing—"ought to have known better than to speak to you, if he is what a gentleman should be."
- "I am quite sure he is a gentleman," I said emphatically.

Mother made no reply. She reserved her opinion.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SOME ENGLISH RELATIONS.

I DID not see much more of my unknown friend after this little check upon our intercourse. He neither sought nor avoided me, and I did a little avoid him—the result of which was an occasional "Good morning" only. I think he must have left us at Suez, for I missed him in the train afterwards, and he was not of our party when we set sail again. To tell the truth, by the time our voyage was over I had almost forgotten his existence.

We called our voyage over at Brindisi;

it was over so far that we were given up to our own devices, and no longer bound to consult those times and tides that wait for no man. There was no occasion for us, as daddy said, to get to London in a couple of days; and we certainly did not hurry ourselves. We went to Venice, and Florence, and Naples, and Milan, and Rome, and all the famous continental show-places that tourists always go to-Australian tourists, at any rate. I was in such a hurry to see them (for Tom had described them all to me) that I was allowed to overrule mother's sensible suggestion that we should get home first, and come back as sightseers afterwards.

I was as fresh and vigorous as possible, and so was daddy; and, if mother felt fagged with her travels, and needed a resting-place for the sole of her tired foot, she

was the last one to own to it. And she got some pleasure from the knowledge that it was not the season for tourists proper, and that we could not therefore identify ourselves with those objectionable persons -as we all certainly gained a great advantage in having quiet ways to travel in, and the skies of spring above us. We "planted" the bulk of our luggage in various railway centres, and we went a round of sight-seeing that occupied us for several weeks, taking in (besides the places I have named) the highways of Alpine Switzerland, and old-world Norman cities that struck me dumb with their beauty. I appeared in the traditional colonial character-not surprised at anything; for I was simply so overpowered by the wonder of all these astounding novelties that I could not express myself. I gazed,

and listened, and sighed, and sometimes rubbed furtive tears out of the corners of my eyes; but such a spell of silence fell upon my nimble tongue as it had never known, perhaps, since it learned the English language. Mother, I need scarcely add, was highly gratified by this unaccustomed well-bred reticence on my part, which she had hardly expected. I am quite sure she accounted for it to herself on her favourite theory of the instinct of gentle blood.

At Paris we took up our abode for a week, not so much to see the lions of the city, though we made a point of missing none of the bigger sort, as to indulge in an extensive course of shopping for pretty clothes for me. It had been arranged that, on our arrival in London, we were to make our head-quarters for a while at

aunt Alice's house in South Kensington, and, from the time that that was settled, mother had shown herself extremely anxious that I should be provided with what she called a suitable outfit. also spoke about it, and bade her not consider expense in making her purchases, for that he "should like the child to be as well dressed as other people." I taxed them with thinking that I was a beauty, and wanting to show me off to my English relations; and when they declared that I was a conceited monkey, and that they never thought anything of the kind, it was transparently evident to me that they did not adhere to the truth quite so strictly as usual.

Mother, who was a born economist, and never, I am sure, wasted a shilling in her life, set to work in those Paris shops as if she were a Baroness Rothschild at least. She began, in the most systematic manner, with lovely underclothing, and handkerchiefs, and collars, and cuffs, and worked up, through shoes and boots, dressinggowns and stockings, gloves, and ties, and sash ribbons, and laces - all those manifold little costly things that I had hitherto been but sparingly supplied with -to the more important features of a bran-new wardrobe; and, then, what she laid out upon dresses, bonnets, jackets, and things of that sort, I should be afraid to say. She had been born with that rare attribute, taste, and no number of years in the bush had had any power to impair it; and though the clothes she bought me had not a costly appearance, and were all more or less simple in style, they were so fine and delicate and distinguishedlooking, that they were fit for a princess. Poor dear Bronzewing must have sold well, I told father, when all our purchases were made, including, of course, some war paint for mother, which was of no account to her compared with my equipment; but he only smiled, and patted my head, and showed himself well pleased with our extravagance.

"So he did, Kitty; so he did," he replied, gaily. "And the wool has sold well, too. So spend what you like; I can afford it, my dear."

We crossed the Channel at last, in rough weather, and arrived at Charing Cross on a cool evening of early summer, where we found uncle Goodeve's carriage waiting for us, with aunt Alice sitting in it. My uncle, who met us on the platform, stout and smiling, with his hat in his hand, and

his polished bald head rosy with excitement, gave us as warm a welcome as returned prodigals could desire—a little too warm, I fancied, for mother's liking. under such very public circumstances. was a merchant of London city, who was not ashamed of the trade that had made him wealthy. If anything, he was inclined to be rather ostentatious about that fourpenny-bit which he laid out in Covent Garden refuse when he was seven years. old, and which was the foundation of his fortunes. He delighted to sit at a table groaning with solid plate and dainty dishes. and to declare that he had dined daily off a mutton chop and a pint of half-and-half for nearly twenty years, or-what was better—that "time was when he was thankful to make a meal of potato-parings." He never failed to tell you, if you referred

to him on certain every-day social and domestic questions, that he was a "plain man," who had never had any time to attend to fal-lals. A plain man he was certainly, in more senses than one, but hearty and hospitable, and the very soul of all kindness. I "took to" uncle Goodeve from the first moment that I knew him. when he grasped my hand in both his own, and beamed on me with eyes which, if not quite a match for one another, and rather put in the shade by the breadth and substance of his cheeks, were most truly benevolent and fatherly. And he and I maintained, from first to last, an unwavering friendship for one another.

Aunt Alice was another matter. When the luggage, on two or three cabs, and uncle Goodeve and father in charge of it, had left us, and I found myself in the

family brougham with the care of all such small matters as shawls and dressing-bags, sitting with my back to the horses, and my face to my mother and aunt, I could survey the latter with great advantage, and did not take long to make up my mind that I should not get on with her as well as I should with her husband. She had the advantage of him in being decidedly handsome in her own over-blown style. There was a strong likeness to father, but it was spoiled by an air of conscious importance that he could not have worn if he had been made king of England. She was enormously stout, and looked a great deal stouter in a sealskin jacket, bordered with sable; her face was full and florid, with at least three chins to it; and her bonnet, which was much higher and gaver than those we had seen in Paris, and

perched far back on some braids at the crown of her head, did nothing to soften its too obtrusive outlines. She was so stout, so rosy, so magnificent in her dress, that she gave one the idea of being prosperous to repletion.

I ought to have admired her very much, for she was exceedingly kind and cordial, and it was pretty to see her ways to mother, who had been made much of in the Chamberlayne family in former days. She held her hand and coaxed it, and she gazed into her face, expressing again and again her wonder and pleasure to see her so little changed by all she had gone through.

"I suppose I look older, like the rest of us," said mother, "but I have had no reason to be changed otherwise. I'm sure I can't look careworn."

"Yes," said aunt Alice; "of course you look older, as who wouldn't in seventeen years! But you are so like what you used to be—I don't mean in not looking careworn; indeed, I can't describe what I mean exactly. You don't seem to have lost your old ways; and your style"—glancing at mother's travelling dress—"is exactly what it always was, half Worth and half Quaker."

Then she turned to make a careful survey of my personal appearance, and declared herself still more astonished that I was so unlike what she had expected me to be, after being brought up in the bush all my life. At which mother gazed out of the carriage window in placid dignity, to imply that it was an irrelevant remark, not requiring comment.

"Did you expect to see me black, aunt, vol. 1.

and dressed in opossum skins?" I inquired.

"My dear, of course not. But I must say you look—well, very different from what I expected. A stranger would not guess that she had not been in London all her life, Mary," she added in an encouraging tone, to mother.

"If I had been in London all my life," said I, "I expect I should have been dead tired to-night, instead of feeling as fresh as if I had just got out of bed. Oh, mother, I hope there are some open spaces somewhere, where I can have a run sometimes, and a breath of fresh air!"

"There spoke the wild girl of the woods," cried aunt Alice, laughing merrily. But mother did not smile, as she was expected to do, at that little joke, and I was sorry I had spoken.

We arrived home—to a stately house in a great square, where all the houses were much alike—and were ushered by a liveried man-servant into a sort of back drawingroom (which aunt Alice called her boudoir, though I never would). It was a lofty room, with pale distempered walls, and a dado of the very latest fashion, as I was told, and some of the newest designs in artistic furniture and ornaments. carpet, however, asserted itself with painful distinctness; and over a lovely tiled chimney-piece was reared the most enormous pier-glass, in the most overpowering gilt frame that, I should think, was ever designed as a memorial of a barbaric age. I afterwards discovered that a mammoth pier-glass was a striking feature of each of the lower rooms; and by-and-bye I also discovered that this article of furniture had

a sort of symbolic significance to uncle Goodeve, and was thus prominent in his establishment by his express desire. In his early days of struggle and privation it had stood to him as a sort of sign of wealth and plenty, and of all that was refined and elegant in domestic art. And now he obstinately refused to deny himself the pleasure of possessing it, in the largest sizes and the most elaborate gilt frames, though he was quite willing that aunt Alice and the girls should indulge their taste in "fal-lals" without any further restriction.

My two cousins rose up from two low chairs when I entered the room, and received me with effusive affection. They were rather small, rather bony, rather sallow, inheriting none of that fulness of flesh and colour of which their parents had enough and to spare; and they were neither plain, like their father, nor handsome, like their mother, nor anything particular, in fact. I did not call them even tolerably good-looking, though Bella, the youngest, certainly had nice features and very fine eyes. They wore their hair cut in fringes on their foreheads, and pretty well tossed about over the rest of their heads; and their dresses were tied back so extremely tight (a fashion that was then in its early extravagance) that it was with difficulty they managed to shuffle along, for it could not be called walking.

However, they were very kind and attentive, and my heart warmed to them. They took off my hat, and loosened my jacket, and drew the softest low chair to the fireside for me to sit in; and they commiserated me for having made that "dread-

ful trip" across that "awful Channel," and for all the rest of my late fatigues, in a manner that I much enjoyed, though conscious that my face proclaimed the prosaic fact that I felt rather invigorated than otherwise by what I had undergone. youthful page in brass buttons brought in a silver tray of little teacups, with their elongated saucers garnished with wafers of bread and butter; and we sipped and nibbled as we exchanged our little questions and replies, until it occurred to them that I might like to go to my room, whither they both accompanied me, and where I found a fire, and some fresh flowers, and little welcomes of that kind, which I Mother's chamber warmly appreciated. was close by, and she had retired into it for the night, for she was really knocked I found her in her dressing-gown, in an armchair by the fire, and a maid making preparations for tea at a table beside her; and she looked happy to have found a resting-place after all her travels. Bertha and Bella seemed to think it very odd that I did not want to retire also, but were much pleased when I declared that I would prefer to join them at dinner.

"Then you must make haste and dress," said Bertha, "for we are very late to-night, and the bell will ring in a quarter of an hour."

"And we will send our maid to help you," said Bella, with which the two girls hastened off, while I went down on my knees, and tried to tug open a big wicker trunk, out of which I was determined to drag one of my prettiest new French evening dresses, so as to look as unlike an aboriginal Australian in opossum skins as

possible when I appeared amongst the family in the drawing-room. I was a little ruffled by aunt Alice's remarks on my appearance, and I told mother so.

"Never mind, dear," was mother's placid reply. "She is a good, kind creature, but she has been amongst city people a good many years, and perhaps that is not quite the best school for manners."

Oh, if aunt Alice had heard her!

A smart young maid appeared in a few minutes, and began to toss my things over cheerfully; gradually becoming more respectful in her handling of them as she became aware of their style and quality. By the time she had laid out and examined the dress I had chosen to wear, she was almost reverential. And when she saw it on me, fitting so exquisitely, and falling away behind with that indescribable grace

that no folds will take at the hands of ordinary dressmakers, she quite went into raptures. As I surveyed myself in the long glass, the thought occurred to me, I am ashamed to say, that even a perfect French dress would not have looked as well upon her young ladies as it did upon me. "How I wish dear Tom could see me!" I sighed to myself pensively.

I went downstairs in a majestic manner, conscious of being nice to look at, which—scoff as people may—is a pleasant feeling, and not one to be ashamed of. My dress was black, very cloudy and fluffy, with wide, rich, apple-green ribbons looped into it here and there. Never, when I could help it, would I put an ornament into my golden-chesnut braids (for Tom did not like them meddled with); but round my throat lay the chain of silver balls and

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diamond stars, and on my bosom shone the emerald cross like a royal order. I joined the family on the stairs, and went down to dinner on uncle Goodeve's arm. I heard cousin Bertha say to father behind me, "How very nice-looking Kitty is, uncle Chamberlayne."

"Oh, she'll do," responded daddy in an offhand tone, but, as I knew, swelling with pride like a dear old turkey-cock. "She's not so bad, for a colonial."

"But she doesn't look the least colonial, uncle; that is what surprises us so much. Mamma says she cannot understand it. We thought she'd be—well, a little shy and awkward—a little uncomfortable in society—that sort of thing."

"She'd be her mother's daughter, whereever she came from," said father rather shortly, and I felt myself redden at the little minx's unconscious impertinence.

At dinner I was aware that I was an object of great curiosity and interest, and summoned all my arts to appear calmly unconscious of it. The eyes of one or another were always fixed on my jewels, which must have made a wondrous show in such a breadth of gaslight; and other eyes were sure to be watching furtively every movement I made—to see, I suppose, whether I put my knife into my mouth or used my finger-glass to drink out of. The conversation turned almost entirely upon Australian topics, and my respected relations proved themselves as sublimely and preposterously ignorant of our modern colonial social life as all other stay-at-home Britons that I have met. was not a bit surprised. I remembered a famous joke in Punch—a sketch of an Australian cousin arriving in a Belgravian

drawing-room at the time of afternoon tea. and, being asked to take a cup, replying that he "didn't mind," if Bella would give him a handful of tea and a billy that he might boil it in the customary manner on the drawing-room coals (I wonder he didn't want to go out into the gardens of the square, and cut down a tree to make When I reflected that his fire with). Punch was a journal of public opinion, enjoying an immemorial repute and prestige as a faithful mirror of contemporary manners, I could not wonder that uncle and aunt Goodeve and my cousins were so astonished to see me behaving myself like a civilised being. And what was damper like? asked Bella, as she took a dainty spoonful of ice pudding. And would I tell her how it was made? And how did gold look when it came out of those funny

cradles? And was it really good satin and silk and velvet that the rich diggers gave their wives when they married those drabs of emigrant girls, and drank champagne out of buckets at their weddings? And were we not dreadfully afraid to live amongst those wild savages who went about at night spearing the cattle? And was it not very fortunate that uncle Chamberlayne had had a sheep station, since it was never known that they speared sheep?

I had not much patience to go into details about these things; I left it to father, who—though he was old enough to have known better—crammed them with shocking falsehoods, which had the effect of confirming their theories, and of making their hair stand more on end than it did before. The only information I vouchsafed was

that I really and truly had seen a live ornithorhyncus, and that, when shot and taken from the river, the smell of its nasty, soft thick body was so unspeakably disgusting that it spoiled my appetite even to think of it.

When I crept into mother's room, to see how she was and to say good-night—feeling very sleepy at last, for it was one o'clock—I confided to her my first impressions of my cousins.

- "They are as kind as kind can be; but oh, mother, they are very silly!" I said despondingly.
- "You must not say that until you have had time to know them," she replied.
- "I used to feel at home that I didn't care for girls," I went on, "but to-night I feel so more than ever. To see Bertha finicking about the tea cups with those

slices of lemon, and talking about the Duchess of Edinburgh and the fashions as if it were a matter of the very last importance, it was so absurd! And she never read a Saturday Review article in her life—she, living in London!"

- "There is a great deal else to read in London, Kitty."
- "Oh yes," I retorted, turning up my nose, "The Queen, and Myra's Journal, and Belgravia, I suppose. Well, I hope the men will be an improvement on the girls. They mostly are, fortunately."
- "Don't express that opinion in public, Kitty, I beg of you."
- "No, mother, of course not; I'm going to be the pink of propriety now."
- "I hope so, darling. Good-night. God bless you."

## CHAPTER IX.

## ELEANOR ARMYTAGE.

THERE was to be a great gathering of the family at aunt Alice's house next day, in honour of our arrival. Uncle Armytage and aunt Kate were coming up from their country rectory with their daughter Eleanor, a girl of my own age, and their son Rupert, a young fellow lately from Oxford, now reading for holy orders. Aunt Kate had three more children, but they were in the school-room, and were to be left at home with their governess. In the evening Reginald Goodeve, whom

his sisters had proudly told me was "an officer," and now quartered in some suburban barracks, was coming up to dinner, and was to bring two of his fellow-officers with him to make up the proper complement of men for the party.

In the middle of the afternoon I was sitting in my room by myself. I had been sorting away my clothes in the drawers and cupboards assigned to them, having no maid of my own, and not wishing for anybody else's, and I had refused to go out when this was done on the plea that I wanted to write letters. Of permitted correspondents I don't think I had any that I cared for sufficiently to wish to make such a sacrifice to please them, for I disliked writing letters, and I had an intense desire to drive in the park, and see the costumes and equipages displayed there

at this season and on such a lovely day. But I had discovered that the Australian mail was on the point of leaving, and I had determined to send an account of our voyage and news of our safe arrival to little Mrs. Barton, our late clergyman's wife, because I knew she would gossip about it to the people who went to church. the Sunday after she got the letter, and that my dearest Tom would hear it all. Father had said "Next mail will be time enough," and "People never make themselves anxious about travellers now-a-days," when I suggested to him the propriety of writing a line to the Smiths, or of asking mother to do so; but, of course, they did not take into account the weary longing for good tidings that my poor, dear, lonely boy would feel. So I allowed my cousins to carry off mother for a drive without me,

and I spread out my materials on a little table near the window, and sat down to my task.

I had not begun to write. I was resting my head on my hand, and looking down dreamily upon the trees and bushes in the square below—very tiny trees and bushes, but green and shady, and sweet with early summer blossoms - and my thoughts were very sad ones. I was thinking of the little bush township and the little brick church, with its shingle roof and its bell tinkling cheerily from the limb of a gum-tree, wondering whose buggy would appropriate the particular corner of the fence where ours used to stand, and who would sit in the choir instead of me, and how my dear love was bearing the dreadful new solitude that had come to him. How vividly I pictured what the Sundays would be to him now! No merry drive home through the parrothaunted bush, one buggy at the tail of the other; no stopping at Narraporwidgee for the immemorial "cold collection" (for the new owner was a retired storekeeper, ambitious, like the merchant princes at home, in his smaller way, of becoming a country gentleman and a J.P.); no happy talks under the apple-trees in the warm afternoons; no hand-in-hand rambles by the river in the lovely moonlight. I knew so well how he would go wandering about by himself, while his father nodded over his English papers, and his mother dozed in her arm-chair—how he would sit on that stump at the water's edge, with our two dogs running races round him, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, and think of his Kitty at the other

side of the world, and wonder if she would keep true to him through those two long, long years.

"Oh, Tom," I murmured aloud to the empty air, while my tears dropped fast upon the white sheet before me, "what shall we do without one another? Oh, what shall we do?"

There came a little tap at the door at this unfortunate juncture, and I wiped my eyes fiercely.

"Is anybody in," asked a sweet-tuned voice that I had never heard before.

"It must be aunt Kate," I said to myself, and I rose reluctantly to admit her.

Aunt Kate was my godmother, and my father's favourite sister. She had been in the habit of sending little presents to me on my birthday, and otherwise showing an interest in my existence, and it seemed quite natural that she should seek me in this affectionate haste. But it was not aunt Kate. It was a youthful little creature, with soft hazel eyes and a tender pale face, dressed in the severest grey homespun, with only big pearl buttons to trim it, and a little grey bonnet, with a white border peeping out under it upon her smooth brown hair.

"I heard you were in, cousin Kitty," the sweet voice said, "so I have come to call upon you. I am Eleanor Armytage, and I am so glad you are come home to us at last!"

Here she lifted her small arms and clasped my neck to kiss me, whereat I—the last person in the world to be sentimental with strangers—hugged her fervently, and then burst into violent weeping. This is how I made the acquaintance

of the best and dearest of all my English cousins, sitting beside her on a low sofa at the foot of the bed, with my head on her shoulder, and my hand clasped in her lap, like a weak-minded school-girl. I cannot describe the delicacy of her sympathy, and her delicate ways of expressing it, with so much self-possession and such an entire absence of "gush," and yet with such a flutter of emotion about her, and such an evident sound of tears in her voice. In my own rash and headlong way, I lost my heart to her there and then. But I only indulged in what, for me, was an extraordinary weakness for a very few seconds, and then I sat bolt upright and abused myself roundly.

"No, I am not a bit tired, and I do not feel strange—people are too kind to me for that; I'm just a great baby, and I'm ashamed of myself," I said, scrubbing my wet eyes angrily. "Pray don't think I'm such a donkey in the ordinary way, cousin Eleanor. To think of my receiving you for the first time by falling on your neck and weeping, like a born idiot!"

"Don't call yourself any more names, Kitty," broke in Eleanor, with a rather hysterical laugh. "I'm sure I understand it. I know it just happens—just once in a way—when you are thinking of things that even if a dog comes and looks at you it upsets you somehow, when an army of soldiers wouldn't do it."

When she said that—so true as it was
—I thought of my dear old Spring, and
how he used to come and look at me if
anything was the matter. I could see his
great, soft, wistful eyes, as he laid his nose
on my knee, and held his feathery tail

poised ready to wag the moment he was satisfied that things were not so bad as he had feared, and found himself at liberty to offer consolation. He would never come and look at me any more! He would stray away to Narraporwidgee, and hunt about for his lost mistress; and Tom would go in search of him, and the two would sadly wander back again, heavy-footed and heavy-hearted under the sense of loss and loneliness that weighed them down. I buried my face in the sofa cushions, and broke into such a passion of crying as I had never indulged in since I parted from This time I could not get over it so easily. Eleanor let me alone—that is to say, she went down on her knees beside me, and coaxed my head with her small pale cheek and her small warm hand, and she kept silence while I had it out. I

blessed her for her delicate forbearance, and began to think better of girls from that moment, for her sake.

This was the worst fall I ever had in my daily contest with memory, set always in battle array against me, though I was subject to periodical reverses. And Eleanor Armytage became in a manner identified with my inner life thenceforth, though even to her I did not confide so much as the name of my sweetheart, or the bare fact that I had one. We had not "things in common;" we were as unlike one another as two girls of the same age, belonging to the same class, could well be: but in this earliest hour of our acquaintance we inaugurated a true and tender friendship that will certainly last our lives. Neither of us knew what it was to say one thing and mean another;

we could never take one another in; we were incapable of that amiable, half-unconscious, and, in the main, well-meaning hypocrisy, which, though it makes many fervent friendships, destroys the most of them, sooner or later; we trusted one another with the completest trust, even when our mutual relations were the least agreeable, and occasionally they were not as pleasant as they might have been. And these I take it, are the essential conditions of any friendship that is worthy of the name.

When I began to show signs of recovery, Eleanor poured some water into a handbasin, and sponged my heated face. I sat up submissively to have it done, feeling that I had so dreadfully disgraced myself that I could no longer assert my dignity. "I am so sorry," I said meekly, but the truth

is, I had just got a little attack of homesickness before you came in, thinking of my old friends. I hardly ever cry; but, you know, if once you do let yourself begin, almost anything will start you afresh."

"Yes, dear, I know, and I came just at the wrong moment. I was reading to-day in the train as I came along an old Welsh tale of a chieftain who buried the last of his sons, all slain in battle, and how a bird began to sing in a tree over the grave as they laid the body in it. It said, 'that broke the old chief's heart.' It was nothing, of course, to all that must have gone before, but it was just the particular touch that pierced him. I am sure I understand that. Do you like reading old poetry, Kitty?" she added, hastily, fearing this pathetic story would tempt another

outburst if she gave me time to think about it.

I told her I liked poetry of all sorts, if it really was poetry, and not sentimental platitudes in rhyme. And then we had a discussion about Tennyson, and our first "falling out"-for, having cordially agreed that the music of some of his descriptive passages, and the perfect beauty of some special poems and verses were enough to haunt one's memory to one's dying day, she went on to glorify him as an infallible deity in human shape, while I contended that a man who wrote such shocking bad grammar as he sometimes did hadn't learned his art, notwithstanding the years he had been about it. First, she denied the accusation against his grammar with indignation (touched with an air of kindly toleration for a critic who probably did

not know good grammar when she saw it); and then I quoted several passages in proof of it from a volume lying on a table at my hand, in a clear prose voice of triumph. Whereat, having to shift her ground, she planted herself upon the very popular theory that a great poet was "above those trivial considerations," as being, in her opinion, a perfectly safe basis of operations. Upon which I hotly insisted that a poet had his responsibilities as well as his privileges in his dealings with his mother tongue, and asked her what she would think of a great poet who sat down in a room with her with his hat on.

Finding this argument unproductive, we went on to discuss books in general, and in particular the literature of the colonies; whence I drifted into reminiscences of Narraporwidgee life, and Eleanor told me

of her home in Norfolk. And so we talked—puzzling one another a little at times, I with my childish ignorance of some things and my wide and cultured acquaintance with others, and she with the strange, formal lines of thought and judgment in which her clear intellect flowed, until my cousins came home, and found us laughing and gossiping over a cheerful cup of tea, like old friends.

I must introduce the rest of my relations in a few words, and have done with it. Here is the family party, on its way to dinner:—

First in order, next to mother and uncle Goodeve, is dear aunt Kate, with her gentle face like Eleanor's, her soft grey hair, her soft grey dress—less like father in some ways than aunt Alice, but with more of his genial frankness in her kind

A very pretty woman she must have been when she was young; even now she has a certain bloom and brightness in her fair faded face that is very winning to me, expressing, as it clearly does, a warm, and loving, and sympathetic nature. She is younger than aunt Alice, but she does not wear a low-bodied dress, and flowers in her hair, as Mrs. Goodeve does. Some soft old lace, and a pearl brooch at her throat, and a little lace cap with lappets on her head, are the modest ornaments of her elderly lady costume; and father tells her, as he lays his broad palm on the thin fingers she rests on his coat sleeve, that she is prettier than she was when she was the belle of the family, and all the beaux of the county were after her.

Uncle Armytage, though he comes last, as aunt Alice's chosen squire, must be

introduced with his wife. Tall, largeframed, majestic, with fine lines at the corners of his mouth, and a noble old Roman nose much elevated in the air, he has a dignified and imposing presence which awes me just a little. His voice is measured, his accent particularly pure and refined, his manner the least trifle verging upon pompousness; but, as mother says, and she ought to know, there is no mistaking him for a well-born and wellbred gentleman in whatever company you find him. Every one defers to him as if by instinct; every one listens when he lays down the law, which he does with the least possible imperiousness; and the servants wait on him with a silent assiduity that marks their (always correct) estimate of his social importance. As a clergyman, he is one of a class by no means rare in

England, I am told; but looking at him on the outside I am quite sure I never met one the least like him before.

Behind aunt Kate and father, I come sailing downstairs, radiant in white net and the inevitable jewel that I am so proud of; and Reginald Goodeve is my cavalier. A handsome young man in the common sense of the term, with shaven cheeks and close-cropped head, a bold pair of dark eyes, and a delicate, silky, dark moustache, not to speak of a tall and slender figure which evening clothes become, he justifies his sisters' inordinate admiration of him perhaps, though I do not consider him worthy to be for a moment compared with Tom. Perhaps I am a little prejudiced to-night in my first impressions. I remember Tom's warning to me not to have "anything to do with" him, because he

was not a nice fellow; and I cannot help feeling that there is a shade of familiarity in his way of talking to me that is not so much cousinly as an indication that he considers me a colonial bumpkin, and, as such, not requiring the strict courtesy demanded by ladies of his own world. And then he asked me about Tom just now, before we left the drawing-room, in a particularly offensive manner. "How's Tom Jones—Jack Robinson—what's the fellow's name?—that young bushman of yours who was at Christchurch—whom Bertie Armytage brought here to a ball once?"

I was very angry at his impertinence, and I answered him haughtily, and then, seeing him taken aback and puzzled to understand why I should fire up at such an innocent question, I crimsoned to the colour of a peony; whereupon he smiled mischievously, and began to tease me in what I thought an extremely vulgar manner. However, he is too bright, and chatty, and good-humoured to be repelled altogether; and, as we go down the stairs, arm in arm, all in the bright gaslight, I am in too high spirits to be disagreeable, even if I wished.

Behind us, in her noiseless way, glides pretty Eleanor, in her sober draperies of black gauze, with one white rose in her smooth hair, shining out against the sleeve of her gigantic attendant, Captain Damer. I need not describe her, though I long to do it over again, and Captain Damer is only a huge, ponderous, good-natured fellow, with the biggest red moustache I ever saw, and a voice like muffled thunder. Behind these again hops cousin Bertha on the arm of Lieutenant Wiggles. Bertha

is gorgeous in frizzled hair and a bower of artificial flowers, and a gown so tight about her legs that it puzzles me to understand how she will get upstairs again when dinner is over. Lieutenant Wiggles is a little, skipping, dancing-master sort of man, with a high metallic voice that reaches me distinctly, even through the thickness of Captain Damer's body and his tremendous bass notes.

"Your pretty little colonial heiress far exceeds my expectations," he is saying (the horrid little wretch, I should like to box his ears!).

"Yes," replies Bertha, also in a clear falsetto, and with a peculiar drawl that I notice she wears in the evening, with her other full-dress ornaments; "yes, she has agreeably surprised us all. You really would hardly know she was colonial if you were not told."

"I am quite sure I should not. And her dress—really now, her dress is quite perfect—now, isn't it?"

"Oh, her dress!" says Bertha, with what sounds like a sharper intonation of voice. "Of course her dress is the correct thing, for it was made at one of the best houses in Paris. She did not bring that from Australia."

"She brought that fine figure, though."

Here Captain Damer begins to thunder away to Eleanor with a somewhat angry vehemence. I know he is kindly trying to shut off that obtrusive dialogue from my ears, and I feel grateful to him. I inwardly determine that I will make myself pleasant to him when he comes up from his wine, and that I will not speak to Lieutenant Wiggles if I can help it. Bella Goodeve and Bertie Armytage bring

up the rear of the family procession, which is closed by aunt Alice and her distinguished brother-in-law. Bella is a weak copy of Bertha, and both of them (as far as I can judge from so short an acquaintance) fair types of a common class of fashionable young ladies not quite in the best society. Cousin Bertie is like his father, in a loose, unformed, elementary way, with a thin, bright-eyed, hook-nosed face, a large frame unfilled and angular, and the shy, quiet manners of a gentlemanly boy. Some day he will be big and handsome, I think to myself, if he does not study too much, or fall into consumption.

And so we sail, and sweep, and rustle into the dining-room, two and two, and are marshalled to our places at the table, which is simply a great bank of flowers, with a shining fringe of silver and crystal all round it, lit up by that dazzling gaslight which I enjoy so much, and which never makes my head ache as it does mother's. Uncle Armytage stands up and says grace, the velvet-footed servants begin to glide about with plates and dishes; Mr. Goodeve beams upon his family party, and says "Welcome" in every line of his kind, ugly, fat face. And my dear father looks round on us all, and sighs, and says to aunt Alice, "We only want James here to make it all complete."

"James!" echoes Mr. Goodeve, with cold astonishment. "James!—my dear Harry, what are you thinking of?"

"I can't help thinking, now we are all together and happy, that I wish poor James were here, too," repeats my dearest daddy, gravely.

The remark is evidently considered by the company (some of them, at any rate) a proof of the disastrous effects of bush life in blunting the polite perceptions of even well-born gentlemen, but mother looks up at him with quick, glad eyes; and, as for me, it is all I can do to keep from running round the table to kiss him.

## CHAPTER X.

## MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY.

For a few days I got on in London in the most delightful manner. I enjoyed a prestige and popularity in my aunt's circle—whether on account of my reputed heiress-ship, or my French dresses, or my personal attractions, or because I was a surprising colonial curiosity, I cannot say—which would have charmed and gratified the least vain of girls, and I was on the way to becoming anything but that. I was taken to the park, and the opera, and the Royal Academy, and the Albert Hall,

and Westminster Abbey, driven in an open carriage through the enchanted streets and the lovely summer weather, in a state of rapturous enjoyment of the novelty of everything and the fulness and brightness of my new life, that no words can adequately describe. I went to Madame Tussaud's and the Zoological Gardens too, surreptitiously, with daddy, at an abnormal hour, and I could have gone on sight-seeing all night, if any one would have taken me. For, thanks to the vigour of my constitution, I never knew what it was to be tired.

But after a few days I got into trouble, and this is how it was:—

One morning—it was either a Friday or a saint's day—Eleanor, who would have lived in a church if she could, came to ask me if I would go to service with her, and I readily complied, though I had never done such a thing on such a day before, except on Good Fridays and Christmas Days, in all my life. As we walked unattended through the quiet streets and squares, I (naturally) thought of Tom going to College Chapel, and I asked Eleanor to tell me about Christchurch, and whether she ever went to see Bertie when he was there. She would have been sure to go to the cathedral, of course, and perhaps she had met Tom, who had had a slight acquaintance with his younger fellow-student. But Eleanor drifted off into reminiscences of an Oxford sisterhood. of which she had some thoughts of becoming a humble associate, if her father would allow her, and told me how the sisters spent their noble lives in teaching the young, and nursing the sick, and reMY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 221 claiming the fallen, until her face flushed and glowed with enthusiasm.

I became interested in the subject, though it was not the one I looked for, and especially in the picturesque sketches that she gave of their many little services in their tiny chapel, and their meals in the great bare refectory, and their little white-washed black-floored dormitories, with the crucifix on the wall over each narrow truckle bed. My heart was stirred to hear how many of them had given up wealth and high position for this lowly but sacred work, and how gentle ladies scrubbed the floors and cooked the dinners for the families of the poor wretched men and women whom they went to nurse in the filthy slums and My fancy was attracted also by her description of the lovely needlework that they did for the church, in those scanty hours when their severe rules of self-discipline allowed them to sit down and rest together. But, after all, it was not a thing that I could realize—women doing without fathers and mothers and the tenderness of home life, and not wishing to be married; and this was a side of the subject that I could not for a moment approve of. "They must just be like old children," I ventured to remark, thinking what hard restrictions they put upon the development of that human nature which should be (perhaps above everything) sacred, but which suffers so many indignities always at the hands of good people. "Life must seem very small to them, poor things."

"Small!" echoed Eleanor. "Oh, Kitty, it is the very greatest and highest life, to give up yourself entirely to the work of God."

"It seems to me they only want to teach God a better way of doing things, and I think His own way is quite good enough, for my part."

- "What way?"
- "The common way, making things better as you go along, and enjoying yourself all the while."
- "That is a very low view of life," said Eleanor, shaking her head.
- "I don't care. I can't help what I think; and it is against sense and reason to suppose that He made us to want husbands and children and happy homes, and all the other pleasant things, and then wished us to do without them."
- "Sense and reason are not the things to go by."
- "Oh, Eleanor! Do you mean to say God doesn't speak in our sense and reason as well as in the Bible. If you do, I can

only tell you I think you are a very irreverent person."

"Kitty," said Eleanor, looking pale and shocked, "it's really dreadful to hear you talk. If I did not know you had been brought up in a country where the tone of Church teaching——"

"Oh, there, you needn't go on," I interrupted rather warmly, feeling a little like a wrestler who has been hit below the belt. "I know what you were going to say. I'll candidly admit that I am a savage and a Hottentot, and save you the trouble. Is this the church? What a queer hole they have put it in!"

"Darling," pleaded Eleanor, with tears in her soft eyes, as we paused on the threshold of the porch, and she laid her hand on my arm, "don't be so impatient, for we must try to understand one another."

## MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 225

I stooped suddenly and kissed her, and asked her pardon for my hastiness; and then we passed together into the church, where, to my surprise, quite a large congregation was assembled, and where my little companion was speedily on her knees, with her ungloved hands folded on the top rail of a rush-bottomed chair, absorbed in her devotions. I am free to confess that I did not attend to mine as I ought to have done. The splendour of the building, the exquisiteness of the music, the strange vestments of the clergy, the attitudes of awe and reverence all around me, particularly the appearance of several sisters of mercy in their black robes, the first I had ever seen, distracted my attention, in spite of me. It was not at all like what I had been used to.

Our walk back was a silent one. She vol. I.

with her red-leaved Prayer-book clasped lovingly in her hand, and a far-off rapt look in her face, seemed too much impressed and surrounded by the atmosphere of worship to wish to be talked to: and I. besides having some new ideas to think of, had an odd feeling of Sunday about me. There seemed something almost sacrilegious in the bustle of the cabs and omnibuses up and down, and the squeal of the hurdygurdy that played its music-hall airs to us as we passed, and more particularly in the longing that presently possessed me to have a good look into the shop windows. This sensation, however, was but transient. It evaporated in the brightness and colour of the streets and the breezy freshness of the sunny air.

I did not talk, but I looked to right and left on all there was to be seen, and made

no more about her. A small groom, very

dapper and polished, stood at those pretty creatures' heads, and to him I addressed myself eagerly—" Whose are those horses?"

"Cap'n Goodeve's, mum," replied the lad, touching his cockaded hat with his snow-white glove.

At that moment out came cousin Regy from the house, buttoning his own gloves leisurely. "Hallo, Kitty," said he, "what do you think of them? A pretty good match, aren't they?"

"They are beautiful," I responded, rapturously. "I should like to know what you gave for them—I mean, what horses of this sort cost in England?"

"I dare not tell you, Kitty, for fear you should let it out. I gave a great deal more than I could afford, to tell the truth; but I hate to drive anything but the best."

"Oh, of course; there is no satisfaction

in that," I coolly replied, still criticising the perfect shape and action of those two. "How I should like to drive them!" I added, with a sigh.

"I should like to see you at it," replied Regy, laughing. "Your wrists wouldn't be worth much to you afterwards."

"And do you think there is nothing but wrists wanting?" I inquired, reddening. "Wrists are not everything."

"Ladies' wrists are not enough, at any rate, to tackle such a pair of steam-engines as these."

"Well, now, Regy, you just let me try. You can be ready to take the reins when I can't hold them any longer. May I try? If they are properly broken, I'll engage to drive them from one end of London to the other, in spite of the cabs and omnibuses."

"What will you bet?"

"I won't bet," I answered; "but, if I find I can't do it, I'll make you a smoking-cap, or embroider your monogram on a set of handkerchiefs, or anything you like."

"Come along, then," said Reginald;

"and make haste, before the girls catch sight of you." With which, he held back my skirt from the wheels as I jumped into the high seat of the phaeton, mounted beside me, gave the small groom two seconds to spring to his perch behind, and, while I was settling the reins properly, the horses almost tore them from my grasp, and we swept down the street like a whirlwind.

"I'd rather not go through London, if any other way will do as well," I suggested timidly, as soon as I had got my breath, and had become aware that the bays were very nearly a match for me, and not quite, MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 231 and that, though my wrists would doubt-less suffer afterwards, they were able to do what they had undertaken. I did not quite like the idea of not seeing more than a dozen yards before me at the pace we were going.

"Of course, we won't go through London, Kitty. Good gracious, what an awful idea! We'll drive about the squares here, where it is quiet, or we'll make for the country, if you like."

"Oh, yes, that is what I should like! I have been longing to see the real English country ever since I came. But where were you going yourself, Regy? Don't let me interfere with your business."

"I've no business, Kitty—none that matters. I'm only too glad to be in attendance upon you. The girls have never given me a chance yet. Now,

where would you like to go? Are you sure those brutes are not pulling your arms off?"

"Quite sure," I replied, gaily. "I have a tolerable set of muscles, though I am a woman, and I hope you perceive that I can drive, Captain Goodeve. As to where I would like to go, how can I tell? You must choose a pretty road for me."

"All right. We'll go to Richmond; that's the prettiest place out, that I know of, within our reach. You are not in a hurry, I suppose?"

"No," I answered, with reckless carelessness. "Being late for lunch isn't like being late for dinner, is it? And I don't think we were going to do anything particular this afternoon. Mother talked about South Kensington, but it was to please me. As far as she is concerned, she is happy

MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 233 if I am out in the air. She hates me to be cooped up as much as I hate it myself; and this will do me more good than fifty museums."

So we "made for the country," and a long time we were getting to it I thought, though the horses raged along as if it were a matter of life and death to be back punctually to lunch. The people on the pavements stared at us a great deal, particularly the men, two of whom, after nodding to Regy, stood quite still to survey us through their eye-glasses as we passed. I touched the horses with the whip, and nearly lost my command of them, so indignant was I at this cool impertinence. "If those are your friends, I don't think much of their manners," I remarked, as I tugged with main and might to keep my hands still.

"They are struck by the way you drive, Kitty," said Regy, laughing, "and by the uncommon pretty picture you make, sitting up here, in that jolly little hat. I should stare at you myself if I were in their place."

"Not in that rude way, I hope. If you did, I should never speak to you again," I retorted, still indignant, but mollified.

So we went on and on; and my spirits rose in the freshness of the morning and the freedom growing around me. The horses gradually subsided to a steady pace, and my hands and arms became more used to the strain they put upon them. I was conscious that I was proving myself a good whip; and, altogether, I so enjoyed myself that I never thought how the time went. My cousin and I had a good deal of conversation, particularly in the quieter parts

MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 235 of the road, and became very confidential about our respective families and affairs. I was in such spirits that I must have talked to the little groom, if no one else had been there; but Regy was as ready to talk as I was, and made himself infinitely more companionable and amusing than ever his sisters had done. He asked me many questions about Australia, and particularly about my father's property; and then he informed me that his own "governor" had been glued to the desk and stool ever since he was a lad, and had been anxious to put his (Regy's) nose to the grindstone also, but that he "wasn't going to touch that beastly city business, not if he knew it." Then he waxed communicative about Bertha and Bella, the former of whom he likened to Miss. Arabella Green in the "Lays of Ind,"

describing her career for two or three seasons past as a systematic husband-hunt, in which she had descended in a graduated scale from seedy lords and baronets, and millionaires, to curates merchant doctors, and poor subalterns in marching regiments, and such like, at which she had heretofore turned up her nose. "She's after old Damer now," said he calmly; "but he don't see it, I fancy. If he fails her, she will take to Wiggles. I think it's very likely Wiggles may succumb, if he doesn't propose to Bella first, for he's been living to a pretty tune lately, to pretend to us all that he's a gentleman, and he is no end hard-up. They are both coming to dine to-night. If you look out, you'll see her little game as plain as the nose on your face."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I

answered, indignantly; "and if you don't know better than to talk of your own sister in that way, Regy, you ought. Now, I won't hear any more. Turn the conversation, if you please. Don't you think those green tints in the hedges and gardens lovely?"

"I suppose they are, Miss Chamberlayne, but they don't strike me as remarkable. I suppose you have never seen a green tree before? Yours are grey, aren't they?"

I set him right upon that point, and then I got telling him about Australian scenery—how it was late autumn now at Narraporwidgee, the green grass springing, and full of mushrooms, and the rivers and creeks rising; how mother would have been storing her winter pears and apples, and cherishing the last of her grapes, and

tying down her batches of quince jelly and tomato sauce; and how father would have been carrying his gun on his shoulder as he went about the run, on the chance of starting a promiscuous hare. And then I paused to think of somebody else (whom I would not name to any Goodeve of them all on any consideration), and of what he would be doing. Whereupon Regy took up his parable again. He talked about autumn from his English point of view, and of the good seasons and bad seasons that he had experienced—what a nuisance it was to get shooting in Kent when the season was early and the crops were harvested in August, so that the young partridges were so scared and wild that you couldn't get near them; and what a worse calamity it was to be invited to a jolly place in Scotland, and to find when

though it might be twenty times Sep-

tember. etc.

MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY, 239

So we approached Richmond; and, as the inhabitants began to show themselves in the quiet road, I asked Regy to take the reins, not because I was tired, but because I did not like to be stared at; and he very handsomely acknowledged that I had vindicated my reputation, and that he would never doubt my ability to do anything any more.

"And now, Kitty," said he, as we were climbing the street, for the first time at walking pace, "it is much later than I thought, and you'll want some lunch.

Shall we put up the horses for half an hour, and have something at the inn?"

"I certainly do feel hungry," I replied.
"I'd rather not go to the inn. Can't we get something at a shop, and go and sit in the park and eat it?"

"Hardly," he said, laughing in gentle derision. And at that moment we passed by the trees of the terrace, under which nursemaids and children were sitting and playing, and I saw for the first time that enchanting picture of the valley of the Thames, in its morning beauty and all its early summer colours, and for a few seconds I felt as if my breath had been taken away.

"Oh, Regy," I burst out, clasping my hands together, "was there ever, ever anything like that?"

"Yes, isn't it pretty?" said he, smiling

at my enthusiasm. "I don't think it any great shakes myself, because I've seen the Mississippi, and Niagara, and the Rhine, and all those places; but most people go into raptures over it. Aunt Kate thinks, like you, that it beats everything. I suppose the old Thames is as fine a river as many, after all."

"A river!" I echoed, thinking of that little watercourse between Narraporwidgee and Booloomooloo, over which the gumtrees shook hands, and which was crossed by fallen logs in all directions. "Oh Regy, what a river!" I wondered if Tom had ever seen it from this point; and I mentally determined that, when the time came for him to ask me where I would like to spend my honeymoon, I would propose a sojourn in Richmond, that we might come and sit on the terrace every day.

16

I gazed and gazed, until Regy and his horses got fidgety together, and the former reverted to the previous question. "You'd better let me take you to the Star and Garter, Kitty, and get you some lunch. It won't take any time, and these poor little beggars"—indicating the horses—"will be glad of a mouthful, too."

When he mentioned the horses I had nothing more to say, for I had been brought up to a sense of the sacred duty of taking care of those valuable commodities, and they were his, and I was, in a manner, his guest. But it was with great reluctance that I dismounted from my seat and allowed him to lead me into the hotel, feeling instinctively that the nature of the excursion was changed.

"Sit down and rest yourself, Kitty," said he, brightly, coming towards me down

MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 243 the long room, after a short conference with a waiter at the door.

- "No, thank you," I replied, nervously; "I'm not tired. I suppose we shall not wait more than a few minutes?"
- "Oh, no—they are very quick, these people. Lunch will be on the table in a moment. But you may as well make yourself comfortable; take off your hat, won't you?"
- "Oh dear no, thank you. Regy, you are not going to have a sit-down lunch for me, I hope? A glass of wine and a biscuit is all I care for—really."
- "A biscuit—nonsense!" said Regy; "you just now said you were hungry." And then a waiter came in and cut short my protest. The table was laid—very quickly, it is true, but with all the appointments of a formal meal. Regy stood

on the hearthrug and put his hands in his pockets, and meanwhile surveying me with such an aggravating smile under his little silky moustache that, though I was angry to feel myself at a disadvantage, I scorned to let him suppose I thought the matter of the least consequence. I turned to look out of the window on that lovely, lovely valley, and I asked him some questions as to the various objects in the landscape, but somehow I had not the same heart to admire it now, for I kept saying to myself, "Mother would not like me to be here alone with Regy-I am sure she would not like it." However, I could not help it now, and I did not know how much it really mattered. The dishes were placed on the table, and our chairs handed for us; I was ravenously hungry, and some fish was uncovered just under my nose,

MY INTRODUCTION TO MRS. GRUNDY. 245 smoking hot in its white napkin, that was more delicious than anything I had ever tasted. Though I was not quite easy in my mind I made an excellent meal, and felt all the better for it.

- "Have some *pâté*, Kitty," urged Regy, as I rose and took my gloves from my pocket.
  - "No, thank you, Regy."
- "Well, have some fruit. These are early nectarines—the first of the season."
- "No, I have finished, thank you; and I do think, Regy, we ought to be going. Mother will be getting very anxious about me," I pleaded earnestly. "I am sorry I came now I see how long we have been."
- "Oh, don't say that, Kitty; it has been the very jolliest morning I ever spent. But I'll have the horses round at once."

He had them round, and we left the

room together. On our way out we passed a group of gentlemen; and one of them, moving backwards, brushed against me, and apologised. Something in his voice was familiar to me, but I was too much preoccupied with my hurry to get out of doors to think about it until afterwards. When I found myself once more in the open air, I was easy in my mind again. I enjoyed the drive home, though the afternoon was warm and bright and I had no sunshade to soften the glare on my head. I did not drive now; I sat at my ease, and looked at the people we passed, and at the carriages, which, as we drew nearer London, seemed to be setting in the direction of Richmond like a tide. Regy was rather silent, and took out his watch now and then.

"I hope you won't get into disgrace,

Kitty," he said, at last, when we were once more in the neighbourhood of his paternal roof.

"Why should I?" I asked; and I thought he took rather a liberty when he made the suggestion.

"If I were you," he went on, "I wouldn't say anything about the Star and Garter, Kitty; we'll keep that dark, shall we?"

"I don't know what you mean," I replied, proudly, lifting my head in the air. But I felt that I was one tingling blush to the very soles of my feet.

"Oh, all right—I didn't mean anything. Only I thought your mother would be vexed, perhaps," he said, a little tartly.

## CHAPTER XI.

## LORD WESTBROOK.

"Vexed," was no word to use in describing the displeasure and mortification of my poor dear mother when I boldly went straight off to her with an honest account of myself; nor, I must say, was it adequate to express my own feelings when I comprehended—dimly at first, and then with sudden, blinding clearness—the enormity of my indiscretion. I went to my own room and sat down by the bedside, with my hands in my lap, and said to myself, "Oh! if it were only ten years hence,

that it might be as forgotten as if it had never happened. Oh! if Regy had never been born, and I had only girl cousins!" And when Eleanor came creeping in to look for me, I laid my burning face on her shoulder, and had a good, hearty, downright cry, and said to that kind friend and comforter, "Oh! if I had never set foot in England, Eleanor, how thankful I should be!"

I had a very bad time of it altogether. Mother and I made it up between us, for she knew I was innocent of any idea of impropriety, and was sorry to be obliged to suggest it to me; and daddy was away with uncle Armytage somewhere, and I don't think was ever told about it—nor would he have scolded me if he had been. But when I joined the family as they were sipping their afternoon tea together, aunt

Alice took me to task, in the midst of them all, and lectured me in a manner that was simply intolerable. What with her "usages of society," and "what people would say"—on which she harped with a stupid reiteration and persistence that was the more aggravating as she knew I had heard all that was necessary on those points from my own proper guardian—and what with Bertha and Bella chiming in with their well-meant but silly little excuses for my ignorance, they drove me into a rage amongst them, and I am afraid I was impertinent. Aunt Kate was the only one who thought of laying the blame on Regy, and of course I disclaimed any advantage to be got from that on the ground that I had myself asked him to take me. Upon the whole I paid dearly for my little escapade, and not only in the

immediate punishment that I suffered. I turned over a new leaf in life, so to speak, and I missed something that had graced the pages that were shut up and done with—some innocent liberty and freshness of youth—that I never found any more. It was fortunate for me, however, that a greater event occurred, to eclipse the importance of this one, before the day was over—at any rate, I thought it was fortunate for a little while.

I was sitting on the floor of my bedroom, with my hands clasped round my knees, having dragged from an open drawer beside me the dress I meant to put on for dinner, and then fallen into a reverie in the midst of its tumbled folds, when Bertha and Bella burst in upon me without any ceremony of knocking at the door.

"Oh, Kitty," exclaimed my elder cousin,

flinging herself down before me, still dressed as she had come hours ago from her afternoon drive, in a huge Gainsborough hat set very much on one side, from beneath which her fringes and feathers of fluffy hair were blown all ways about her flushed face, "not that grey thing, I beg of you; your white silk, or the Brussels net, or the black and green; one of your very best, dear; for somebody is coming to dinner."

- "I know-only Regy's friends."
- "Somebody else," explained Bella, breaking in. "Tell her quickly, Bertha; there will be none too much time to get ourselves ready."
- "Well then, Kitty," announced Bertha, with portentous solemnity, "Lord Westbrook is coming."
  - "And what then?" I inquired per-

versely, assuming a languid manner. "I don't suppose he will have any particular objection to a grey dress more than anybody else."

"But, Kitty, you don't understand, he is an earl, and he has never been here before; and of course we must all look our best. You know what an earl is, I suppose?"

"I hope so," I replied grimly; "but I am obliged to ask who this particular earl is, to have so much fuss made over him."

"Why, Lord Westbrook—the patron of uncle Armytage's living, and the squire of Westbrook. His seat is within a mile or two of the rectory. He met uncle Armytage quite unexpectedly at his club this afternoon, and your father was there too, and it seems he has known your father before, though I'm sure I'm puzzled

to see how. And while they were talking together papa joined them, and somehow it ended in papa asking him to come and dine with us to-night. And he said he would. He is only in London for a few days; he is on his way to fetch Lady Westbrook home. She has been in Rome, and he has been—I don't know where—travelling about by himself."

"Rather a singular arrangement between married people," said I, at which they both giggled in an ecstasy of amusement, and then informed me that Lady Westbrook was his mother, and that he had as yet no wife.

"That is what surprises everybody," said Bella; "for he is not so very young."

"What is he like?" I inquired, beginning to feel interested.

They had never seen him, they replied;

all they knew was that he was very grand, and very rich, and very fond of going about the world; that he had a big house in Grosvenor Square, and great shootings in Scotland, and a lovely yacht, and racing stables, and a coach, and a perfect national gallery of pictures. As it happened he possessed none of these things, barring the house, which was let to strangers more often than not. He had an encumbered estate, which had been at nurse since the death of a gambling father a few years before; and he was no more "grand" than other people, and perhaps not so There was some truth in the much. pictures, about which my cousins were coolly and disparagingly critical, having heard that they represented modern schools that either were out of fashion, or had never come in. I was quite sure that they

did not know one old master from another, any more than I did; but I did not say so; and it did not in the least matter to me whether Lord Westbrook's taste in art was orthodox or not.

"Now, Bella," said Bertha, jumping up, "we really must go and dress. I have my hair to curl all over again, and so have you. And, Kitty, make yourself nice, and put on your emeralds, for the credit of the family, there's a dear. And don't fret yourself any more about that Star and Garter business. I don't suppose you met anybody we knew, and, if you did, they'll remember you have just come from Australia, and make allowances."

With which well-meant effort to console and encourage me, they hurried away to their rooms; and Eleanor, always more than punctual, presently came to me, ready dressed, with her gloves and handkerchief in her hand.

"Let me lace you up, Kitty," said she, seeing me struggling with my bodice and tags.

"I wish you would," I replied. "This may be a pretty dress"—it was a fluffy white cloud of Brussels net and lace—"but it is a great bother to get into it." Whereupon she laced me up, and tied back my skirt, and settled the little fichu that crossed over my breast, and a nestling little knot of fern leaves and flowers that daddy had just brought me home; and, during this performance, she told me some more about Lord Westbrook.

"The last time I saw him was about four or five years ago," she said; "for he is very seldom at Westbrook, and we have never met him in London until to-day.

There was a great party at the hall for shooting, and he was down for several weeks; but I was too young to go out then. I mostly saw him at church, and once at a Sunday-school treat, when he played cricket with the boys. He was somewhere between twenty and thirty then, and had not long come into his property. He was very peculiar in many things," continued Eleanor. "He never used to wear gloves out of doors, nor tall hats: he used even to come to church in a tweed suit and a wideawake. I suppose it was because of living abroad and travelling so much."

"I hate dandies," I said, turning my head to see if my fichu set properly behind.

"His tenants and servants are fond of him, though he does stay away so much," she went on. "He always takes care to be well posted up in all that concerns them, and he studies their interests more than his father did. Besides, Mr. Barrett, his agent, is a good, excellent man, whom he can trust; and his mother is a kind woman to the poor. I don't think he is a sound Churchman," she wound up, with a little sigh, "and that is a great pity. He would have such influence if he were, in his high position. Indeed, papa thinks he would hardly go to church at all if it were not to please his mother."

"If he goes to please his mother, that is very good and dutiful of him," I observed. I think Eleanor would have had something to say upon this comparatively low view of the matter, but my little travelling clock on the mantelpiece chimed eight, and that sent us both scuffling downstairs, for it was the dinner hour.

We found the drawing-room full of guests; all arrived except the one most anxiously looked for. I went through a few hurried introductions on the arm of my uncle, and was delivered over to Captain Damer's charge; and then poor Mr. Goodeve, who was the soul of punctuality, and a little of a gourmand to boot (in spite of that traditional mutton chop and pint of half-and-half), took out his watch and I felt disappointed in our sighed audibly. unconventional nobleman, who showed himself wanting in good taste, according to my view of things, though my cousins apparently considered it quite correct that so great a man should keep little people waiting for him; but it was scarcely five minutes over the hour when we heard him running lightly up the stairs, and before the servant could announce his name there

he was in the midst of us, apologising to his hostess with the gravest sincerity. He had had a telegram from his mother, he said, which obliged him to leave London earlier than he had intended, and had necessitated the making of some new arrangements which had delayed him. Aunt Alice deprecated any excuses, and beamed upon him like a noonday sun. The rest of the family closed up round him, so that all I saw was the back of an ordinary well-dressed man, slight, middlesized, and sinewy, and the top of a closecropped dark head bowing up and down. But in the course of his introductions he presented his face to me, and, to my unspeakable delight and astonishment, I recognised my acquaintance of the mail steamer, looking at me with just the same twinkle of amusement in his keen eyes as had covered me with confusion when I first saw him. He was so ready with that pleasant smile that it was quite evident he had expected to meet me; but I had no more expected to see him than to see my dear Tom himself. I gave a joyful start, and held out my hand eagerly, and he grasped it with a warm and friendly pressure that I did not hesitate to respond to.

"Kitty," whispered Bertha, sidling up to me when he had passed on, "I ought to have told you that people don't shake hands when they are introduced. *Pray* don't forget that another time, dear."

"Nonsense," I responded flippantly, with a beaming face of satisfaction, as I watched my hero's voyage round the room. But I did not tell her that I had met him before, and thereby left her to suffer agonies of mortification at the betrayal of my igno-

rance of the "customs of society" to a lord. When we had taken our places at table, he was sitting—not opposite to me, where he would have been hidden by a huge piece of aldermanic plate, which cropped out of the bank of flowers like a bush on a Queen Anne garden hedge, but midway between this and a well-filled china flowerpot, exactly in the position which, to all intents and purposes, was opposite; and several times I caught myself looking at him, and listening to him, instead of attending to my dinner and my attentive cavalier. His quiet, clear voice was easy to hear at a distance, and would have been very pleasant to listen to without any associations. Though he by no means interfered with any one else's flow of eloquence, or staggered anybody with an unusually profound display of wisdom, he seemed to talk all over the table, and to keep the stream of conversation always fresh and sparkling. There were none of those "brilliant flashes of silence" to-night, which so often make the heart of a hostess sink within her, and aunt Alice's beaming face expressed the utmost satisfaction.

I was quite content to listen to him, sending him a frank smile occasionally when he said something particularly amusing to his immediate neighbours, and I did not want him to talk to me. I don't think he would have attempted it either, only that by-and-bye uncle Goodeve took it into his head (when recommending some specially choice old wine) to discourse at large upon the empty stomach of his child-hood, and how hard he had found it to outgrow an early predilection for ginger-pop, which for many years had been to him

the most rare and costly of attainable beverages. This turn in the conversation made poor aunt Alice so evidently unhappy that Lord Westbrook quickly interposed with a fresh and (as he thought) harmless topic. Catching my eye at the moment, he leaned forward, and addressed me in a gentle tone that was perfectly audible to a dozen people besides myself.

"I think I saw you in Richmond this morning, Miss Chamberlayne, did I not? You were coming out of the Star and Garter as I was going in."

I could not help it, though it almost maddened me, but at this sudden and public mention of my misdeeds the blood rose to the very roots of my hair, and flowed a brilliant scarlet all over me, even through the gauzy haze on my neck and shoulders.

Aunt Alice forgot about the ginger-pop (to which she was accustomed), smiled grimly, and pursed up her mouth; Bertha gave a start, and hung her head; Regy scowled and fidgeted, and looked uneasily at me. Certainly they did all that in them lay to help me to blacken my character in the eyes of this distinguished visitor. As for him, he glanced quickly from one to the other, gravely puzzled and astonished, as well he might be. He looked hard at Regy for a moment; then his eyes swept coldly over my face, and he turned to ask a servant who was passing for sauce, as if he had not spoken to me. If he had been my oldest and dearest friend I could not have felt more deeply hurt and shamed. The colour sank out of my cheeks—it seemed to be draining out of my heart, I

felt so suddenly cold and sick with my dismay at what had happened. The other listeners considered probably that I was merely showing my savage bringing up by being overwhelmed with the notice of a lord. If he had only thought that, disgusting though it would have been, I could have borne it. But I knew as well as possible that he suspected me of "gallivanting" clandestinely, and of being now found out—I, I, who might be a tomboy and a scaramouch at times, perhaps, but would no more have done anything "fast" than I would have committed a theft or a murder, knowingly. Though my bitter mortification almost drove me into tears. I made a struggle for appearances, and answered him as calmly as I could-my voice sounding very tremulous and cowardly

in my own ears. "Yes, Lord Westbrook, I was there. It was the first time I had seen Richmond."

"And did you not admire the scenery very much?" he then inquired, with an anxious look of kindness that seemed to say he was sorry for having distressed me, though his voice was a little cold.

"Very much," I replied lifting my head and getting defiant. "My cousin says that the Thames is not be compared with the American rivers and the Rhine; but it is grander than anything I have ever seen."

"In its way I consider the Thames is above comparison," he said. "If your cousin had been a painter or an angler he would not have disparaged it."

Here he went off into a disquisition upon river scenery in general, and upon fishing grounds in particular. Two or three people soon struck into the dialogue. Somebody began to talk of the "Strange Adventures of a Phaeton," which I had just read, and had deeply fallen in love with. Captain Damer, who neither knew nor cared to inquire whether I had been to Richmond with one cousin or with three, thundered away upon all sorts of trifling topics, and did his best to entertain me. And so dinner went on as before.

But for me all the flavour was gone out of the French dishes that wafted subtle perfumes over my left shoulder every five minutes or so. "No, thank you; no, thank you; no, thank you," I repeated mechanically, until Captain Damer began to think it was monotonous, and became concerned at my loss of appetite. It was

not often that I alarmed my friends on that score, I must say.

"Don't you care about these things?" he inquired, in a smothered bellow, taking up a gilded and crested carte that lay between us. Probably he thought that a diet of damper and mutton had disqualified my palate for that kind of food. "To tell the truth, no more do I," he added. "Fellows boast about their chef, you know, and give you no end of a dinner if they invite you to their club; but nine-tenths of us choose a slice from a plain joint in the coffee-room when we have only ourselves to please."

"But I don't like slices from plain joints, and I am very fond of made dishes," I replied, "though these ridiculous names," pointing to the *carte*, "never give you any idea what they are made of. Only—theroom is hot—I lunched rather late—I am not hungry to-night."

I scooped a spoonful of cream out of a meringue as I spoke, and felt that a crumb of its fragile substance would choke me.

END OF VOL. I.

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